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MARRIED?

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BOOKS BY
MARJORIE BENTON COOKE

BAMBI
CINDERELLA JANE
DR. DAVID
MARRIED?
THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE
THE CRICKET
THE DUAL ALLIANCE
THE GIRL WHO LIVED IN THE WOODS
THE THRESHOLD

"'Marcia!' he exclaimed, 'Marcia!'"

MARRIED?

BY

MARJORIE BENTON COOKE

FRONTISPIECE
BY
REGINALD F. BOLLES

GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1921

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MARRIED?

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MARRIED?

CHAPTER I

MISS LIVINGSTON stepped into the foyer of the Toy Theatre. A low light burned there, and Miss Paul was talking earnestly with a girl in the box office. She looked up as the door closed and smiled.

"Good evening, Marcia," she said.

"Evening, Mary Jane. Is the rehearsal on?"

"Yes—Sawyer has just called the first act."

Miss Livingston went on into the darkened body of the house. A little nervous man paced up and down the aisle, listening to the actors who read their parts from script. He gave Miss Livingston a curt good evening. She scarcely responded, and seated herself well away from him, toward the front, nodding to the actors as she sat down.

The play was one of Dunsany's and in the first stages of rehearsal. The director halted them every few lines, suggesting different in-

flection, another reading, or a different quality of voice. Miss Livingston bore it patiently for about half an hour, then she called Mr. Sawyer to her.

"Why do you bother with the way they inflect their lines, when it's obvious that they haven't got the idea of the play?" she demanded.

He sighed impatiently.

"We'll put the colour in later. We have to build the framework first," he answered.

"I consider that an old-fashioned and stupid way to go about it," she objected. "This is a study in terror. Unless every move and every word contributes to the expression of terror, the thing's a failure."

"Miss Livingston, I have been on the stage for twenty years."

"Mr. Sawyer, that is the one and only thing I have against you! You belong to the old school which passed around parts on a typewritten slip and let the actors piece the story together at rehearsal as you do a picture puzzle. It utterly discounted any brain on the part of the actor."

"If you don't like the way I rehearse——" he began.

"I don't! That's what I'm telling you. Get the company to understand the spirit of this

play, and your inflections will take care of themselves."

"Of course, Miss Livingston, this is your theatre——"

"It isn't because it's my theatre that I want you to use some common sense," she answered hotly.

Miss Paul slipped into the seat behind them.

"How is it going?" she asked diplomatically.

"Not at all, according to Miss Livingston," he said brusquely.

"I merely suggest that he is rehearsing from the wrong angle——"

"I will gladly hand the rehearsal over to you, Miss Livingston——"

"All right," she said, rose, and walked down the aisle to the stage.

The actors, sitting and standing about, turned at the sound of her voice.

"Friends, Mr. Sawyer and I disagree about the rehearsal of this play and he has most generously allowed me to try the act my way. I'm coming up——"

She disappeared for a second and then came down stage among them.

"Has anybody read you the play aloud?"

"No."

"Well, sit down. I shall read my interpretation of the first act, and then we'll discuss it."

The company seated itself with a covert smile here and there. This eccentric lady entertained them highly with her revolutionary idea about the theatre.

Marcia Livingston began to read. The key in which she pitched her voice, the hush with which she impregnated the lines, the sense of impending doom which she built with every speech, rolled up and up, until her audience scarcely breathed; they dared not look out into the black theatre which held some monstrous thing. As she laid the last word upon the climax, somebody said: "Good Lord" so devoutly that the spell was broken and they all laughed, shivering slightly at the sound.

"My contention is that until everybody in the cast realizes that he must contribute to the terror of the audience, he's just wasting time. Now—does everyone disagree with my interpretation?"

"Don't you think Thibour might be played a little more as comedy relief?" asked the gentleman cast for Thibour.

"I do not. There mustn't be any relief—you must pile it up to the bursting point, *I*

think. But maybe I'm wrong. We'll try it your way, and all decide it together. Now—let's begin. Never mind your lines—just try to give Mr. Sawyer and Miss Paul and the others out there cold shivers down the spine!"

They began again and in a crude way the play began to take shape and colour. One or two actors were so carried away that good, spontaneous business resulted, which Marcia seized and made permanent. She interrupted only once for lines—that was when "Thibour" repeatedly misquoted his lines.

"It's so awkward for me to say it that way, Miss Livingston. Can't I change it so it seems natural?"

"You may not! You change one word and I'll invent a new and terrible punishment. You've got no more right to change Dunsany's words than you have to take my pocketbook!" she said, decidedly. They all laughed at that, and the rehearsal proceeded.

At eleven o'clock she called an adjournment, and went out in front where Miss Paul and Mr. Sawyer were having a conversation.

"Well, Mr. Sawyer, did I get results, or not?"

"You got an effect, certainly, for to-night.

By the time they've rehearsed it for two or three weeks, their 'atmosphere of terror,' as you call it, will be perfectly mechanical—it will be as stale as old bread."

"I'm willing to stake anything on it that my way is right."

"I'll stake my job that it's wrong!"

"All right. Miss Paul will act as witness and hold the stakes," smiled Marcia.

"It will be necessary, of course, for you to conduct all the rehearsals in the experiment," he reminded her.

"Oh—I can't do that!" she objected.

"Then that settles it, so far as I'm concerned. If I'm to be the stage manager of the company, I must rehearse my own way——"

"You mean you won't go ahead on this idea I've blocked out?"

"It's not my way——" he evaded.

"Oh, very well. I'll do it myself, then. I shall expect you to be present at all rehearsals, just as though you were conducting them."

"Very well," he said curtly.

"You see I make the punishment fit the crime, Mr. Sawyer."

"I believe death is the usual penalty for *lèse-majesté*," was his reply.

She laughed, said good-night, and led Mary Jane Paul up the aisle with her.

"How that man does hate me! It's quite refreshing," she remarked.

"After all, you do hire him to stage manage the company, don't you?" asked Miss Paul.

"I do—and he does it stupidly. I show him that he's wrong——"

"You haven't shown him yet——" interrupted Miss Paul.

"But I intend to."

Miss Paul made no comment.

"I take it that you disapprove of my taking over the rehearsal," continued Marcia.

"It's your own business, of course. My opinion is that if you engage a man to do a certain thing and you dislike the way he does it, the proper sequel is to discharge him."

"I can't till I show him he's wrong."

"Why can't you?"

"He'll say it was just because it was my theatre that I had to have my way."

"But you worse than discharged him, you belittled his authority before the company he is supposed to direct."

"I'll make him handsome amends."

Miss Paul shook her head.

"You're generous, Marcia, always, but you're not just."

"Good heavens, Mary Jane, what is this tempest in a teapot?" demanded Marcia.

Miss Paul drew her into her office and closed the door.

"It isn't such a trifle as you think, Marcia. This is the third stage manager we've had this season."

"I know it—marvellous what fools they've all been!"

"Granted. But if you want to do the things you plan in this theatre, then you've got to face one fact. Either you must delegate the authority over productions to a director and stage manager, or you must make this theatre your business and do the directing yourself."

"I can't give all my time to it, Mary Jane, you know that."

"Well—I've mentioned what the alternative seems to be, from my point of view."

"But you're practically telling me to keep out of my own theatre!"

Mary Jane Paul looked her friend and her employer straight in the eye.

"What I am trying to tell you, Marcia, is this: This little theatre is a plaything to you—a toy, you play with it for a while and then you

tire of it and go off to Europe. We get it to humming along quite well, when you come back, and like the greedy child in the fairy book, you snatch your toy back——"

"Mary Jane Paul! I'm not like that!" Marcia burst out.

"I'm sorry to be disagreeable, because I'm so fond of you, Marcia. I'm not saying there are not plenty of reasons why you are like this. You're too rich and too pretty and too spoiled—but the fact is you cannot endure opposition, and you have to be boss."

"I seem to be getting a considerable dose of opposition to-night. You've cast yourself for Dutch Uncle apparently!" interposed Marcia, holding on to her temper with difficulty.

"I'm sorry to be nasty to an old friend, Marcia, and if you think I've said too much, I'll hand in my resignation."

"Rubbish, Mary Jane—don't be a goose!"

"I think you've got a good idea, a wonderful plant in the theatre, and a chance to do a valuable and constructive thing. I want to help with it. But I know we cannot accomplish anything the way we're doing now."

"You think I'm the whole trouble," said Marcia.

"I think you're the main trouble. Sawyer may not be the perfect director, but he gave an excellent production of *The Cliff Dwellers*, and if he's left alone, he may work out very well. If you think not, let's find someone else, but let's give full power to the man we appoint."

"I'd rather give up the theatre! What fun is it for me to run it, if I'm to have no say about how things are done in it?" said Marcia hotly.

"I didn't suggest that. Certainly the director ought to carry out your ideas. My objection is to an autocratic authority which can interfere at any moment."

"You think the thing's a failure?"

"Far from it. It's an experiment in the first stages, of course. Why don't you get hold of Sawyer and make him like you——"

"I don't care whether he likes me or not."

"How about asking young Brooks to direct the next production? He's the most intelligent actor in the company."

"I'll think about it."

"Do. It's nearly midnight now, my dear," Mary Jane said quietly.

Marcia rose.

"I ought to be raging mad at you and I think I am!"

"Why should you be raging mad at the frank opinion of a good friend who loves you?" said the other woman bluntly.

"It takes a very good friend to be so disagreeable!"

Mary Jane Paul laid her hand on Marcia's shoulder. "You don't think that, really, Marcia?"

"No—I suppose not," admitted Marcia. "I have had a perfectly horrid evening and I shall now go home and hate myself."

"You'll make me sorry I spoke."

"You needn't be. I suppose I hear the truth seldom enough, considering my needs!"

Mary Jane laughed.

"You're a good sort, Marcia," she said. "See you to-morrow?"

"Certainly. I called rehearsal at ten. I've got to work at the galley now to prove that I'm right. Extraordinary how many people in this world are all wrong——"

"But how do you prove they are wrong, Marcia?" Mary Jane Paul inquired.

"I don't need to prove it. I know it. If they disagree with me, they're wrong," was Marcia's parting remark.

Mary Jane's laugh at her childishness turned into a sigh and a headshake.

CHAPTER II

ONE of the many contributors to the Livingston estate was a property known as the Santa Rosa Ranch. Thousands of acres of it spread over the mountains and through the fertile valleys, stretching almost to the imaginary line which divides California from its lower peninsula.

It was Marcia Livingston's grandfather, Henry Livingston, the sturdy pioneer, who had laid the foundations of the family wealth. He had bought up these many acres from the shiftless descendants of the old Spanish grandees, who once rode this country in gay cavalcade, spending their days in hunting, their nights in gambling and the wassail bowl. They had their lands by grants from the crown of Spain, and in their day they lived royally on the fat of the rich land.

The story ran that Henry Livingston was a good hater, and that he possessed one enemy worthy of his metal. This man was named Parnell Shawn, and he, too, was concerned with

laying up for himself "treasures upon earth." He was a brilliant Irishman, as witty as Henry Livingston was dour. The two men had come to the grappling point when Shawn was made president of the Great Western Railroad, in the face of Livingston's bitter opposition. The latter was a director in the road and a large stockholder. Upon Shawn's election Livingston resigned and sold his holdings. He immediately began to negotiate for great tracts in the Carmencita valley, where he intended to grow eucalyptus trees for railroad ties, and in time, corner the market and hold up the plans of the Great Western to triple its trackage.

By some turn of luck Shawn heard of Livingston's plan. He, too, began negotiations with the impoverished farmers in the valley. But Livingston had them tied up, so to speak. He had bought all the country for miles, and for little more than the proverbial song. His holdings were about twelve thousand acres, but he met one obstacle which he could not sweep aside. In the very heart of the Santa Rosa Ranch there was an estate belonging to a Spaniard, Don Padrasso, whose father had the original grant. It consisted of five thousand acres of fertile land, much of it in thriving eucalyptus

forests. This old man and his granddaughter lived alone with a servant on this place. He refused absolutely to sell. He said that his granddaughter loved the place and it must descend to her. To all offers he was adamant.

Shawn discovered this situation and he entered into negotiation with old Padrasso. He outbid Livingston, and Livingston outbid Shawn, until a veritable fortune was offered the Spaniard, but he still refused. When the girl was twenty, old Padrasso died, and the bidding began again, but the girl was as obstinate as her grandfather, and continued to live in lonely grandeur upon her ancestral acres.

In due course of time Livingston and Shawn were gathered to their fathers. But the fight between the Great Western and the Livingstons to possess the Padrasso Ranch, the fertile heart of Santa Rosa, descended to the next generation. Henry Livingston had established the beginning of a great fortune. His son was conservative, a careful investor, in whose care the money doubled. He handed on to his daughter Marcia a big inheritance. In his time it was that Señorita Padrasso was persuaded to rent her land to the Livingstons for cultivation, at a big rental, which kept her in luxury.

Parnell Shawn left a comfortable estate to his son, who inherited all of his father's wit and charm, but not a trace of his ability. He spent his last farthing before he died, donating to his son, Dennis, a frail constitution as his only inheritance. Dennis's mother, at the urgency of her doctor, brought the boy into Arizona, where she opened a boarding house, and by dint of hard labour, managed a living for them. She hated her life, but yet she was content because she saw Dennis growing stronger with each year.

She died when the boy was fifteen, leaving him her scant savings. Her death left him desolate. She had been his idol. His whole future had been built upon the hope of what he was to do for her, to make up for the hard years.

He left Arizona and drifted to California. There followed the ten wander-years, in which he travelled through the great Northwest, acting now as ranchman, now as clerk. It was life in the open that interested him. Cities he found stifling. He liked men and animals, but women he shunned.

It is not too surprising, since chance weaves such strange patterns, that young Shawn was foreman on a ranch in California when Judge Horace Tracey, one of the executors of the

Livingston estate, came to visit an old friend, the owner of this ranch. He was received by Shawn, in the enforced absence of his host and in two days of constant association with him, was greatly attracted by the Irishman. He discovered his relation to old Parnell Shawn, who had figured so largely in the history of the Livingston family.

So later, when the opportunity arrived, he offered Dennis an assistant foremanship on Santa Rosa, and in five years he became superintendent and manager there, as well as the trusted friend of Judge Tracey.

To some people Dennis Shawn's life on Santa Rosa would have seemed dull. But to him it was satisfactory in every respect. The old Spanish adobe house he occupied with his assistants crowned a high hill. On every side the mountains folded them in. Of a clear sunny morning you could see to the ends of the world, and at night the stars were so near that an outstretched hand could pluck one from the sky.

The house was hundreds of years old, with walls seven feet thick. It was built around a patio, where grapevines as thick as a man's arm trellised the walls. The single story contained living room and bedrooms in one wing, dining room

and kitchen in another, all opening on to the patio. Shawn had planted gardens in front of the house which flourished the year round. He tended them himself and was very proud of them.

His household consisted of "Chuck" English, a young college boy, exiled by an irritated father in the hope that the West would make a man of him. English, senior, was a friend of Judge Tracey, and it was through his intercession that Dennis had taken the boy on as assistant. There was Harvey Williams, accountant and secretary, a silent, dignified young man, who lived with the other two. Then there was Wong, the Chinese cook.

Below and behind the house were the quarters where the Slavs and Poles and Italians and Frenchmen lived who worked on the ranch. Their foreman lived in a cottage near the men.

The Santa Rosa now provided the great transcontinental railroads with practically all their railroad ties. There were huge sawmills and a settlement of mill workers in a distant part of the ranch, and a railroad carried the ties to the main branch.

In the early morning Shawn and his associates ate their breakfast in the patio—and a

hearty workingman's breakfast it was that Wong served them. Then he dictated letters to Williams for an hour, planned Chuck's job for the day, and by eight or half after he was on his horse, galloping off into the freshness of the sweet-smelling morning. He rode from morning until night, messing with the men at noon, wherever he happened to be. He was very popular with the men of the many races he employed, and he had very little trouble with them. They were too far from the nearest town to get off for a Saturday night drunk, and Shawn saw to it that the company store provided only enough drink to keep them happy. So as an international experiment it worked out pretty well.

In the late sunset Shawn rode back to his house. An hour in the garden, a swim in the pool they had made with the aid of a captured mountain brook, fresh white clothes, a cocktail from the expert hands of Chuck, a sumptuous dinner served by Wong, a pipe, the cool, silent, mysterious night, with the men singing down in "quarters" or Chuck twanging a guitar and shouting sentimental ballads, then sleep, dreamless and deep. Such were the days of Dennis Shawn.

He found entire satisfaction in Chuck and Williams. They were unlike as any two men could be—the boy noisy, happy, full of laughter, the older man silent, a little grim, perhaps. He laughed at Chuck's antics as Dennis did, but he was a man who preferred books to people. He never spoke of his past, he spent most of his salary for books, which were sent him from Los Angeles, and in his silent way he loved Dennis. He occasionally persuaded him to read a book, and then they discussed it for hours

Dennis found him bitter about women. He suspected a tragedy in his past, but Williams made no confession. They were talking about Weininger's "Sex and Character" one night, as they smoked in front of the house.

"He has it in for women, hasn't he?" said Dennis.

"I thought it was a fair estimate," replied Williams.

"Oh, come now—all women aren't the brainless fools he makes of them."

"Have you had much experience with women, Dennis?"

"No—not much. I don't like them."

"Wise man—keep away."

"I don't understand them—much."

"Men don't—usually."

"I never felt the need of women in my life. I suppose it's no credit to me I've kept clear of them."

"Be thankful and let it go at that."

"What are you two chinning about?" demanded Chuck, appearing from the house.

Dennis laughed.

"Your specialty—women!"

"Gosh, I wish we had some of 'em here! It's the only drawback to this life, Denny, old man!"

"Humph!" said Williams.

"S'truth, old sour ball, a good sprightly girl would liven you up all right."

"Heaven forbid!"

"And as for Dennis, I don't get him. Good-lookin' big buck like that could have any girl he crooked his finger to, and he won't even go down to Los Angeles and see a girl show."

"I should say not."

"Well, you're makin' a great mistake, my boy. I tell you a man needs the ladies—sometimes I jolly well feel I'm wasting my life up here in this—this——"

"Eveless Eden!"

"Yes, that's it."

"Don't Shawn and I provide you with in-

tellectual companionship, Chuck?" inquired Williams.

"Intellectual—yes. I don't want *clever* women. I want 'em pretty and silly!"

"Williams, we must see that Chuck gets 'a raise' so he can marry and bring his wife out. It would be so good for us to have something 'pretty and silly' around the place."

"Why not get a parrot?" asked Williams, strolling down into the garden.

"Poor old Williams! Some girl must have given him a nawsty wallop! Isn't he the crab on women!"

"He's apparently not a 'ladies' man,'" smiled Dennis.

"All right for him—but you——'

"Oh, let up on me, kid. You amuse me more than any wife could."

"I'm going to form an alliance with Kate, that beautiful Mexican demi-mondaine, old Pinto's daughter——"

"None of that, Chuck!" from Dennis sternly.

The boy laughed.

"I'm off to court her now, with my trusty guitar and a knife in my Boston garter."

He sauntered off.

"I mean what I say! I'll bounce you if

you try any of that native wife stuff," Dennis called after him.

He sat on alone, smoking and thinking. He did not wish to be different from other men. He had decided long ago, in his days of ranching, that some men must be less highly sexed than others, just as some men lacked a hunger for drink. That some fastidious sense, of which he was rather ashamed, had kept him from enjoying the Saturday night debauches of his companions, was a fact. He wondered if there was some woman in the world who could arouse his need of her. Then he recalled Williams's "Wise man—keep away," and smiling, he went out to join the misogynist in the garden.

Presently a motor car wound its way below them.

"Car down there," commented Williams. "Going to Señorita Padrasso's, isn't it?"

"Hm. She doesn't usually have evening visitors. Probably those damned Great Western agents again," said Dennis. "Let's get on our horses and call on the old lady ourselves."

"Take Chuck. I've got a book I want to read."

Dennis went in pursuit of Chuck and ten

minutes later they galloped down toward the Padrasso ranch.

They found the old woman entertaining a strange man, who spoke Spanish. She was thought to be more than a hundred years old, and she was very deaf. She was friendly with Dennis, who did her many a favour, but she adored Chuck who sang to her, made love to her, and made her shake with laughter. The strange gentleman, who was called Roderiguez, did not welcome the newcomers. He tried to engage their hostess in Spanish conversation, but she had no eyes for any one but Chuck. While the latter played monkey-shines, Dennis inquired of the stranger, in excellent Spanish, how long he had been in the employ of the Great Western Railroad, and when he denied it hotly, Dennis laughed. By staying until the old lady went to sleep, they sat him out. They saw him off the place before they rode home.

"Reg'lar movie stuff, isn't it?" said Chuck. "Two great corporations held at bay by old Spanish heiress with the keystone acres."

"Great mistake to have grown our best forest on the old lady's land, I should say," commented Dennis.

"Will be if the Great Western grabs her

ranch in the end. Some day one of their agents will get her to make a cross to a document, he'll choke her a bit, and we'll find her dead and the land gone!" prophesied Chuck.

"I think I'll just establish a guard over her. After all, we rent her land and cultivate it—we can say we're guarding our property," Dennis mused aloud.

"You dote on this ranch, don't you, Dennis?"

"Yes."

"Miss Livingston couldn't hire many such managers."

"Miss Livingston didn't hire me—Judge Tracey is my boss."

"He's only executor. She's the whole cheese. Ever see her?"

"No."

"I have. Beauty! Regular spoiled, papa's darling of a beauty. Say her father never refused her anything in her life. You ought to see her, Dennis."

"Not I! I never think of her as a person. She's just the human appendage to the Livingston estate. That's all I want to know about her."

"Lord, you are some humorist! Fancy calling Marcia Livingston the human appendage

to the Livingston estate!" laughed Chuck mightily.

"I wish we'd threatened that fellow to-night."

"Can't keep the old girl from having callers, I suppose. I'd better marry her, Denny, and sell you the land the minute she dies. One of these days she'll fall to pieces like the one-hoss shay, and one of us has got to be on hand."

Dennis laughed, touched his horse, and galloped the last half mile to the ranch house, with Chuck at his heels hallooing wildly, with echoes answering on all sides.

"Shut up!" begged Dennis, whereupon silence closed down like a huge lid upon the world.

CHAPTER III

MARCIA LIVINGSTON devoted herself entirely to the rehearsals of the Dunsany play. It was characteristic of her that, given an object and sufficient incentive, nothing could stop her attainment of it. She refused all invitations during the day, and if she did accept a dinner, she ran away as soon as the coffee was served. Back to "my job" as she phrased it. Her friends all laughed at her, but the vagaries of Marcia were always amusing to them.

For three weeks she thought, ate, slept, and waked in the atmosphere of Dunsany. Her enthusiasm and tirelessness urged the actors to the same devotion. Finally the night of the premier came and the little theatre scored its greatest success. The critics were congratulatory. The Sunday supplement burst out with special illustrated articles about Miss Livingston and her Toy Theatre. Poor Mr. Sawyer admitted his defeat and tendered his resignation.

"You see, Marcia, you really have a talent for

this if you would only stick at it," said Mary Jane Paul at the end of the week.

"I hate sticking at things—it bores me."

"Doesn't the success of this play please you?"

"Oh, yes, I intended to succeed, but I'm tired to death, and after all, is it worth getting so tired for?"

"Dear old Marcia, that what's-the-use spoils everything for you, doesn't it?'

"Yes! I suppose so. Beastly tiresome world, Mary Jane."

"It isn't to people who *have* to work."

"Rubbish! I don't believe it. That's just a sham—that work-and-you'll-be-happy business. Everybody naturally hates work. The dream of every living creature is to get money enough so he will not have to work."

"There are lots of people whose work is the thing they live for. They don't care about money at all. Giving up work would be Hades to them."

Marcia smiled.

"Mary Jane, I've been hearing about those mythical busy bees all my life and I've never met one that I believed in."

"I can take you to a whole bee-hive of them!"

"For goodness sake, do! I'd like to be con-

vinced that I am wrong. The whole thing seems to me a vicious circle. To get the work of the world done leisure and money are dangled as a bait. But the rich know that leisure and money spell boredom."

"But the rich worked during the war, Marcia."

"Yes, but that was hysterical. Things had to be done quickly, the result was important. Whether you were any good or not, at least you knew you were a patriot. That's all gone now. You can't keep up the pace unless you've got a consuming desire to uplift the race, or make over humanity, or start a social revolution. I don't want to do any of those things."

"Well, it's a pity. It is the fanatics who are really happy!" exclaimed Mary Jane.

"There isn't any school where they graduate fanatics, I suppose," laughed Marcia.

"If I wanted to be bromidic I'd say the School of Life," smiled Mary Jane. "Why don't you marry, Marcia, and have some babies?"

"I never meet anybody I want to live with. Do you?"

Mary Jane laughed.

"I'd be satisfied with plain man—you'd want one-hundred-per-cent hero."

"I don't know what I want. I only know I haven't got it."

Several days after this conversation Mary Jane telephoned Marcia about some matter of business at the theatre. Young Brooks was to direct the next production, and Marcia refused to take any responsibility about what he did or how he did it.

"By the way," said Mary Jane, "were you in earnest about meeting some workers who work for the love of it?"

"Certainly I was."

"All right. If you will meet me at Grand Central Station at three o'clock Friday, in your oldest suit and nothing but a nightie in your bag, I'll take you on an adventure over the week-end."

"You'll find me standing under the clock! Couldn't we motor to the place?"

"No motor—no maid. You will wear an assumed name, and be introduced as an actress or some kind of employee of the theatre."

"Good! Sounds interesting. I'll be there."

Promptly at three Mary Jane Paul arrived at a position under the clock. At quarter after there was still no Marcia. The train left at 3:21. Miss Paul made up her mind that at

eighteen minutes after three she would board her train. Just as she moved toward the gate she saw Marcia saunter through the crowd. She waved at Mary Jane and at her frantic signals she nodded and seemed about to hurry, when Mr. Clarke Jessup stopped her for an elaborate greeting. Meanwhile, the train departed. When she finally joined Miss Paul, that tried friend wore an enduring smile.

"The train has gone," she remarked.

"Oh, has it? Well—can't we get another?"

"Yes, in an hour. It's a slow train and it doesn't stop where we want it to, but that's the price you pay for being late."

"Was I late?"

"You were—as usual."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

"Mary Jane, my faults do wear on you, don't they?"

"At times."

"Punctuality is the thief of time, you always wait for other people. The thing to do is always to be the latest."

Mary Jane laughed.

"You live up to your principles, such as they are, Marcia," she conceded.

"Now, tell me where we're going and why I am incognito."

They sat down in the waiting room.

"We're going up into the country near White Plains, and we are going to stay in a community of artists and craft workers, who have been driven out of town by the high cost of everything. They are trying to support their own needs."

"I see—farm and everything, you mean."

"Yes. They are very simple, and I thought it might make them a bit self-conscious if they knew you were coming. I want you to see them just as they are."

"All right. I'll be Edith Walker, an understudy at the theatre. Is there anything else I have to remember? Don't I look rather poor and working-girlish?"

"Not specially."

"This suit is four years old."

"Um. You might try a simple, humble manner."

"Like this?"

Mary Jane laughed aloud at the transformation, posture, expression, the droop of the head—it was instantaneous and perfect.

"Marcia—you monkey!" chuckled Miss Paul.

"Tell me about the people we're to meet, Mary Jane."

"No. I'll let them introduce themselves."

The journey was certainly tiresome. The old train jerked along, stopping at every station except the one they wanted. Mary Jane hoped to make a connection with a trolley when they finally descended at a junction, but true to form the "Interurban" had just left. There would be no car for one hour and twenty minutes.

"Can't we walk? I will not sit in this place all that time," said Marcia.

"Roads is bad, lady. We've had a lot o' rain out here."

"Come on, Mary Jane," urged Marcia, leading the way.

Mary Jane smiled and followed. The first half mile of road was fair, but after that it was heavy going. It was muddy and slippery.

"How far is it?" demanded Marcia.

"Station man said four miles."

"My Lord! Look at my feet—and I haven't got any other shoes."

"Neither have I. We'll have some work cleaning them."

"Do we have to clean them ourselves?"

"Of course we do."

"I'll sit right here, then, and wait for something to happen. If all I've got to look forward to at the end of four miles of this is the fun of cleaning my shoes, I'm through. Something has got to happen."

She sat down on a rock.

"The 3:21 train lets you out in the heart of the place."

"If you'd told me that, Mary Jane, I would have made the train."

"You may sit here all night——"

"No, I won't. Here comes a wagon now——"

Marcia hurried out and stopped the driver, explaining their dilemma. He motioned to the back of the wagon. They got in, and jolted off up the road, bouncing up and down as the wagon struck the mud holes. It was dark when the driver stopped and indicated lights half a mile away.

They trudged along silently, too tired to talk. Finally they came to the lighted houses and Mary Jane lifted a door latch and entered. A woman sat in the firelight and a man was playing the piano magnificently.

"Why—it's Jaronski!" exclaimed Marcia.

The woman rose and came to welcome them.

Marcia, upon introduction, became every inch Edith Walker. She had only time to note the spacious, almost empty, room, before they were led away to the guest chambers. These were simple rooms, bare of all except necessities. Sleeping porches contained the beds. There was a bathroom.

Madame Jaronski, a famous violinist herself, promised that Jaronski would clean their boots. Marcia laughed at the idea.

"But—Mees Walker—Jaronski pride himself upon boots. He cleans well."

"No, thanks—we'll do our own," said Mary Jane firmly.

"I weel geev you some sandals for to-night. To-morrow, we clean boots."

Bathed and rested, and wearing the welcome sandals, the two girls descended later. They were taken then to the community centre where everybody dined. They heard much talk and laughter as they entered. One group sat at a big table, and some family tables were scattered about. Marcia noticed that they all wore a uniform garment and that it was exceedingly individual. The costume consisted of wide trousers and a sort of Chinese coat for both women and men. They all wore leather san-

dals. But the colours were varied. Some women had added a wide sash to belt in the coat—some were plain, some decorated.

The food was simple but good. Certain members served it. Introduction of the guests was followed by a clatter of talk. The theory of the community was explained, based upon equal labour for every member.

After dinner almost everybody straggled along to the Jaronskis' house, where those magnificent artists played as Marcia had never heard them play before at any concert. There was a simple friendliness about the group that was restful and charming. Later Adolph Simmons, the painter, asked them all to his studio to see a picture which he had just finished. As they strolled along, Jaronski fell in step with Marcia.

"Have you lived out here ever since you came to America, Mr. Jaronski?" she asked.

"No—oh, no. For five miserable years I leeved in thees terrible countree before I found thees place."

"Why terrible?" she interrupted.

"Oh—crude self-satisfied reech! It is money—money—eet can buy anytheeing! Art, happiness, beauty—yes, says America, I weel buy it with money."

"And you think that cannot be done?"

"I know eet cannot. You can buy only material things with money. So much to eat—so much to wear—it ees all you can buy. Here we know that. Here we have our work and our play and that ees all we want."

"Is that why you gave only two concerts in New York last winter?"

"I gave many concerts in New York last winder, Mademoiselle. Down on the East Side, to music lovers, I give many concerts. Selma and I, we care not for money."

They entered the studio of the painter. The same workmanlike simplicity was here. He set up the canvas, in the proper light, and waited. It was a symbolic thing called "The Goal." It pictured mankind—the struggling, toiling mob, the hand of each upon the shoulder of the one before, faces upturned as to some holy grail.

"But what is the goal?" someone demanded.

The painter shrugged his shoulders and smiled. The discussion was fast and spirited. A technical criticism of the presentation, the form, brought an illuminating explanation from Simmons. The symbolism of the title came in for attack.

"There is a fine rhythm to your procession,

Simmons. There is music in it. I feel it," said Jaronski.

Suddenly a gong struck. Marcia started.

"It is our curfew, Mademoiselle," explained Madame Jaronski. "We go to bed early and rise the same."

So with "good-night" they separated and went to the various cottages. When Marcia and Mary Jane were left alone, the latter said:

"What do you think about it?"

"It's upsetting, isn't it?"

"Upsetting?"

"Suppose we have got hold of only false values?"

"Look what these people find when they discard them!"

"But you can't tell me they like serving meals and cooking and all that."

"But you change your work all the time. That's why it isn't drudgery. You ought to be here when they all go into the fields for the harvesting, or when they sow in the spring, or when the men chop the winter's wood. They make everything a festival—they sing and dance and make games of their work. It's really great fun."

"Fancy the great Jaronski chopping wood!" laughed Marcia.

"He isn't the great Jaronski here. That's why he loves it. It is a real democracy."

"Don't they get tired of each other, and fight and run off with one another's wives, like the rest of the world?"

"I suppose they disagree—they may even quarrel. But if you're just as busy as you can be all day long, and if you love your neighbour, you're apt to be a pretty normal fellow. It is the artificial stimuli that gets the world we live in so upset."

"Well," yawned Marcia, "no artificial stimuli will keep me awake a minute longer!"

Marcia dreamed that she was lying on top of the water and someone was splashing her. Finally she sat up, trying to splash back. Mary Jane stood peering out of her porch—there were peals of laughter from below.

"What is it?" asked Marcia.

"They are all in the pool. Hear them splash? Jaronski gave it to them. The whole crowd goes in every morning, winter and summer. I found bathing dresses in our room. Want to go in?"

"I'll probably take my death of cold, but I'll go if you will."

They hurried inside to change.

"Lord, is this all you wear?" asked Marcia.

"That's all. It's perfectly decent."

"When in Rome! I look rather nice, don't I?"

They ran down to the pool, where a shout of welcome met them. They found their hosts waiting for them. They plunged in, swam about to warm up, and then raced home to dress.

After breakfast everyone disappeared to his job. Only half the day was spent in community work. The rest belonged to the individual for his own art or for recreation.

Marcia and Mary Jane went at their boot-cleaning on the back porch of the Jaronskis'. They talked and laughed and raced each other. Marcia was sure her boots had the highest shine.

"You see how the thing gets into your blood!" said Mary Jane.

Saturday night was "Jinks Night," and a different group each week arranged some sort of play. This particular night there was a burlesque on Mr. Simmons's picture, "The Goal." It was called "First Base" and was both witty and well done. There was music. Jaronski played the piano in mittens—a convulsing per-

formance—there was dancing and singing by the children.

"There is more enjoyment in this room than the whole of Broadway contains," Mary Jane whispered to Marcia.

The latter nodded. She was deeply interested in this group, there was no escaping the fact. She never relaxed her attention. She was still skeptical. She waited to see a mask drop, to hear a bitter laugh—for the curtain to go down on the play. She had to admit that she was thoroughly enjoying herself meanwhile.

Sunday was distinguished by a sort of choral service of praise out of doors. There was a minimum of work, and games, and a long walk filled the afternoon.

"I've had a wonderful time, you nice people," Marcia said to the Jaronskis at parting.

"You must come again, you will get used to our queer ways," smiled Jaronski.

"I like your queer ways, if I don't quite understand them."

"But it is so simple, when you know the truth——"

"What is the truth?" she asked him earnestly.

"That work and love are the things which count."

"But art——"

"Art is the expression of both of them," he beamed—"the child of their union."

The girls looked back to wave at them from the station. Jaronski and his Selma stood hand in hand, smiling, content, as if they did indeed "know the truth and it had set them free."

CHAPTER IV

THE visit to the artists' guild left a very deep impression on Marcia's mind. She thought of it first with affection, with a sense of pleasure that there was such a sanctuary. But finally a growing sense of irritation pervaded her memory of it. Here were people who scorned what she had, and knew a peace that was denied to her.

Feverishly searching for something to do, she began to plan a school of acting in connection with the Toy Theatre. She and Mary Jane Paul worked out a comprehensive plan for such a school, with a faculty recruited from the best artists to be lured by the large salaries which Marcia was prepared to pay.

She had a real interest in the theatre, felt a real discouragement at the low estate to which both drama and acting had fallen in this country. A school of acting, which attempted cultivation of the mind combined with technical training, might be of service. She knew two men and three women distinguished on the

stage, who had grown old in riches and fame and who would no doubt gladly coöperate in such a scheme to give the rising generation the benefit of their experience and knowledge.

For a month she concerned herself with this idea. She had dinners to which she invited actors, the big scenic artists, and famous dancers to talk over such a school. Her own enthusiasm fired other people and her faculty grew assured before so much as one pupil was enlisted.

Architects drew plans for remodelling the building in which the Toy Theatre was situated. It was to be the most modern, up-to-date institution in the country.

The newspapers, always keen on Miss Livingston as copy described it in detail, reproduced the architects' sketches, had interviews with Marcia and Mary Jane Paul, followed by a symposium of opinions from great actors and managers. Letters poured in from prospective pupils. Work began on the building, and Marcia was busy and content. By dint of speeding up everybody the work progressed rapidly. Then came hours of consultation and days of absorption in decorators and fittings for the various class rooms, rehearsal rooms, dancing studios, and the gymnasium.

Mary Jane Paul counselled union hours and occasional rest days in the country, but all in vain. She knew from past experience that a reaction from this overwork was due, and she devoutly hoped that the plans might be consummated and the school assured before Marcia tired of it, because Mary Jane Paul believed mightily in the idea. She also knew that when Marcia stepped from under, the whole responsibility would descend upon her, just as the theatre itself had been tossed over to her when its wilful owner tired of it.

She loved Marcia Livingston and understood her perfectly for the generous, big-hearted, spoiled child of her environment. She mourned to herself over the restless, unsatisfied spirit of the girl which drove her desperately from one experiment to another.

Contrary to her usual form, Marcia's interest held out in the new venture, until proof had been read on the announcement of the first year's courses, the date of the opening settled upon, and all the details were well in hand.

"Mary Jane, I'm tired. I think I'll go to Europe."

"Couldn't you rest somewhere in this coun-

try, Marcia? There will be decisions to be made all summer long——"

"You can make them."

"I don't like the responsibility."

"You'll decide as well as I can. I'm sick of the whole thing. I want to forget about it."

"But you'll be back for the opening, of course."

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Marcia, don't be silly! Of course you'll open this school. Go away to Europe or wherever you like and amuse yourself."

"What about you? You must be nearly dead. I know your work has been doubled."

This was the first mention of this fact.

"I'm all right. I love it."

"I'm going to double your salary and send you off for six months next winter, Mary Jane."

"No—you'll do neither of those things. My salary is sufficient and I don't want to go away. I'm so interested in the new school that I'd work all night on it, if I dared."

Marcia looked at her earnestly.

"You're a rare person, Mary Jane Paul. I wish I had your power to accomplish things."

"Your record of accomplishment is a fair one, I should say, Marcia." Mary Jane smiled.

"No. I start things, I never finish them. I'd fail without you. Don't imagine I don't know that."

She walked away with that, leaving Mary Jane Paul flushed with pleasure and sincerely touched by the tribute of appreciation.

The height of Marcia's enthusiasm over her school was only equalled by the depth of her boredom with it when it was finally conceived and near completion. She had spared herself not at all, for months, and overwrought nerves declared themselves in no uncertain ways.

It was a rainy Sunday that she reached the lowest stage of ebb-tide. She tried in vain to read. She called up several people to try for a company at lunch, but they all had other plans or engagements. To her great relief Clarke Jessup arrived about one o'clock and said he hoped to be asked to lunch.

"Clarke, you are an answer to prayer!" she said enthusiastically.

"You must make up strange prayers," he smiled. "What's the matter? Low in your mind?"

"Yes—rock bottom in my mind."

"No wonder you're stubborn, Marcia. I

never suspected a granite mind. I thought you'd been elevating the race or the actor or something. Didn't I read about it in the press?"

"Yes, that's the trouble. I suppose I'm too tired and I hate rainy days."

"Poor child. Cheerio! Always get a reaction when you pull off a big job."

"I haven't pulled it off. I never pull off anything. I just dive into an idea head first and then when it gets to be a fact and has to be dressed up in details, I wade ashore and walk away."

"Well, why not? It's something to have made that initial dive. Lord knows, I haven't got the energy."

"I've got all the energy in the world and nothing real to do!" she protested. "Clarke, do you ever wish you'd been born poor?"

"Lord, no!"

"I do. I wish I'd had to work to survive!" she exclaimed fervently.

"What you need is a husband to keep you down, Marcia. I've told you for three years that you ought to marry me."

"I don't see what difference marriage would make to either of us, Clarke. The fact remains

that we both have to keep running around from place to place to make things happen in our lives."

"Maybe—but there's no reason why we shouldn't run together, is there?"

"You don't love me and I don't love you——"

"I can't say about you, of course. I like you better than any woman I know. I don't think modern people, like us, go in for the primitive passion much, do you?"

"Maybe not"—with a sigh.

"Better take me on, Marcia."

"We wouldn't bring one new thing to each other. We wouldn't make one bit of difference in each other's lives."

"No—well, what of it? I don't want to be torpedoed out of all my habits, do you? The war came near doing that to us, and my God! how I do love my habits."

She smiled at that perforce. Presently she began to tell him about the artists' community and of the realities they seemed to have laid hold of. He listened, with his handsome, cynical face turned toward her.

"Nothing in that, old girl—sounds like a bunch of cranks to me. I'm not saying that money buys everything, but to people brought

up as we've been, it's the biggest help there is to getting through life."

"Clarke, isn't there anything to life but just getting through?" she demanded.

"I don't know. Maybe. Doesn't seem to be, does there?"

"Have you ever loved anybody terribly much?"

"Hm—can't say I have. You don't think that would help out, do you? Beastly upsetting, that kind of business."

"But I want to be upset!"

He laughed.

"You're awfully young, Marcia!"

Right out of her heart she answered him.

"I'm awfully lonely, Clarke."

"Poor Marcia. I know what you mean. I've felt it, too. We might protect each other from that, dear."

"Oh—I wonder!"

He came over and put his arms about her. She did not free herself. She stood quite still in his embrace, and the waters of disillusion seemed to rise about her in a flood. What was the use of struggling longer to save herself? Here was a human being, as lonely as herself, who wanted her companionship. His need of

her was not great, perhaps, but none of his needs was very deep. Perhaps this was a way out of her perplexities.

"Shall we have a try at it, Marcia?" his cool voice asked her.

"I don't love you, Clarke," she said, in one last protest.

"Oh—that's all right. I don't expect much. We'll get used to each other, old girl. I think we'll hit it off rather well, if you say the word."

"All right, Clarke—it seems to be a fair bargain. It isn't very romantic, is it?" she sighed.

"Romantic? No. I thought that was rather confined to the stage, now, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Shall we be married right away?"

"No—not until fall, please."

"Oh, that's all right."

Marcia looked at him, so composed, so well done, as it were, and suddenly she laughed. He stared at her, eyebrows lifted.

"Life is so funny, isn't it?" she said hysterically.

"I don't know—not so damn funny!" was his cryptic reply.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK or so after the visit of the Spanish-speaking gentleman to Señorita Padrasso there arrived at that lady's ranch house, bag and baggage, a handsome black-eyed woman calling herself Amelita Padrasso. She brought with her family records and letters and documents to substantiate the claim that she was first cousin of the señorita, the child of old Don Padrasso's second son, Pedro.

The señorita received her with true Spanish hospitality, and Chuck found her thoroughly installed in the household when he stopped by one day to pay his respects to the old lady.

The newcomer was most affable, and made excellent use of a pair of splendid black eyes. Chuck played up to her, until he saw that the Señorita Padrasso was not pleased. He turned his attentions upon her.

"Isn't it fine for you to discover a beautiful cousin?" he shouted at her.

She feigned not to hear him, although he knew by the gleam in her eyes that she did.

"How did you ever find each other out, in all this great wide world?" he inquired innocently.

"I have been searching for my relatives a long time. A friend in Los Angeles heard of Cousin Rita," the newcomer replied.

"Oh, yes—Señor Roderiguez," hazarded Chuck.

"Do you know him?" the woman asked quickly.

"I've met him here, at the señorita's. He's a delightful fellow, isn't he?" he said enthusiastically.

She merely smiled at that.

"Señorita, if we have a party in honour of your guest at our ranch, will you come?" asked the boy.

"No," said the old woman promptly.

"Cousin Rita is so frank," apologized the guest.

"She's old enough to be frank. When I'm sixty I intend to begin to tell nothing but the truth, and by the time I'm her age, nobody will be able to live with me."

"It's all you can do to live with her," sighed the cousin indiscreetly.

"Boy," said the old woman, "come here!"

Chuck crossed to her side.

"Never mind her—talk to me," she ordered.

He grinned and told her some foolishness. She did not bother to smile. It was obvious she was troubled.

"Señorita, you do not love me to-day," he challenged her loudly.

"Where is Dennis Shawn?" she answered.

"He's gone off to look at some trees over toward San Mario."

"He works——"

"He does. He loves this ranch as if he owned it. I tell him he's a fool to care so much about it, because some day he may have to leave it, and then what?"

"He is no fool."

"You'd better marry him, Señorita, and leave him your ranch," hazarded Chuck.

The old woman grinned.

"Who is this man you're talking of?" inquired Amelita.

Again the old woman grinned.

"My lover," she said.

"What *is* she talking about?" demanded the cousin.

"The señorita has to have her little joke!"

"Boy, go away now. Tell Dennis Shawn to come," said the old lady with a royal gesture.

"The audience is over," murmured Chuck. "Adios, your Royal Highness," he said, kissing her hand. "Adios, Madame," he added to the other.

"Come again," she urged him, her eyes shining. "It is terrible here—so lonely."

"Oh, I'll be in and out," he assured her.

He awaited Dennis's return that evening with avidity. He turned over in his mind all day possibilities of the situation.

"Dennis, old man, I've turned up something," he announced to him.

"Have you, Chuck? Anything exciting?"

"May turn out to be damned exciting."

"Well, get ahead with it."

He told about the advent of Amelita, the fact that she knew Roderiguez—his suspicion that the old lady didn't like her.

Dennis whistled a long, slow note.

"Enter the heiress!" said he.

"Bogus!" amended Chuck.

He repeated the señorita's request that Dennis come to see her.

"Too tired to-night. I'll go over to-morrow," he said.

"If worse comes to worst and Amelita turns out to be the real thing, you've got to marry her, Dennis, and save the old farm."

"You've got marriage on the brain," laughed Dennis.

He took himself over to call on his neighbour the next day, however. He was presented to the handsome relative and shared Chuck's suspicion that the old señorita did not like her.

He made himself extremely agreeable.

"I suppose this is an entirely new kind of life to you, Señorita Amelita," he said. "You do not have ranches in Spain, I fancy—it is castles you specialize in, isn't it?"

"What do you say?" demanded his hostess.

He shouted his casual remark somewhat embarrassedly.

"Amelita has not been in Spain," she replied.

"No? Oh—I thought you were only lately come to this country," he exclaimed.

"No—I was born here."

"Strange that you and the señorita have only just found each other."

"Not so strange—this is a big country," she parried.

"Have you lived long in Los Angeles?"

"What makes you think I have lived there?"

"I don't know—oh, yes—Mr. English said

that you knew Señor Roderiguez. I knew he lived there—I suppose that misled me."

"Spaniards always find each other," she said noncommittally.

"Dennis Shawn—do you like Amelita?" demanded the wicked old woman.

"But, Señorita, yes—she is charming—she is your cousin," he replied gallantly.

"Hm!" sniffled she.

Dennis went back to the ranch house and wrote a letter to Judge Tracey in New York.

MY DEAR JUDGE:

A new complication has arisen in regard to the Padrasso Ranch. A woman has appeared who claims to be the only child of Señorita's brother Pedro. She brings papers and documents to prove her assertion. If this is the truth, then, of course, she is heiress to the estate, and we may have to wait another hundred years to add that ranch to Santa Rosa.

I find myself suspicious of the whole affair, however. The woman admits acquaintance with a Spaniard named Roderiguez, whom we feel certain is in the pay-roll of the Great Western. If you authorize me to do a little Sherlock Holmesing, I'll go down to Los Angeles and spy around a bit myself. If she is another of their agents, I'd gladly run her off the place.

You would better wire me directions.

The old señorita is growing very feeble. Her mind seems clear, which is a help to us, but she might drop dead

any day. We'd better dispose of the heiress promptly, if she is counterfeit.

My cordial regards to you, Sir,

Most truly,

DENNIS SHAWN.

Judge Tracey's wire came promptly.

SANTA ROSA Aug. 10th——

By all means investigate woman. I authorize any expense necessary.

HORACE TRACEY.

"Well, boys," said Dennis when he read it, "you'll have to run the shop without me for a while. I'm going to try my hand as 'detectatif.' I'm going after the record of the beautiful Amelita."

"How long do you think you'll be gone?" Williams inquired.

"Depends on how long Amelita's record is. I shan't stay more than a week. I'll put it in a regular agency's hands if necessary."

He paid a farewell call upon the Spanish ladies.

"Anything I can do for you in the city?"

The señorita gave him a few commissions.

"We shall miss you—shall you be gone long?" murmured Amelita softly.

"Not long, I hope," he replied as softly.

"Any message to your friend Roderiguez?" he asked the old lady.

"No!" she said fiercely.

"Shall you see him?" asked the cousin quickly.

"I'm not planning it, but if it served you ladies——"

"He's no special friend of mine," she replied coolly.

"Poor Roderiguez!" he sighed.

In Los Angeles he set himself to find out the whereabouts of the Spanish-speaking gentlemen. He went to the cafés where foreigners mostly congregate, and the second night he saw him. He was with a party of friends and they sat near enough to Dennis so that he could hear their conversation. By the judicious use of a newspaper as screen, he managed not to be seen by Roderiguez.

"Where is Amelita, Roderiguez?" asked one of the party in Spanish.

"She is on a visit," the other observed casually.

Dennis listened attentively but nothing more was said about the lady. When the others rose to go, he followed. He trailed Roderiguez to a

small hotel frequented by foreigners. He saw him ask for his key at the desk and go to his room.

The next day Dennis presented himself at the hotel and asked for Señor Roderiguez. He was not at home, said the clerk.

"The Señora Roderiguez, will she receive me?"

"Señora Roderiguez is away from home."

"She is called Amelita?" he inquired.

"Yes, I believe so," the clerk answered.

"Were they married here in Los Angeles?"

"That I cannot say."

"Have they lived here long?"

"He has been here a year or more. She came three months ago."

"You do not know where I can write to her? I am an old friend. I have not seen her for some years."

"No, I do not know—but Señor Roderiguez could tell you, no doubt, he is usually in at five o'clock."

"Good! I will return," said Dennis.

He looked up the marriage registry for the past four months but found no record of the Roderiguez ceremony. He called Roderiguez on the telephone at five o'clock. He spoke in Spanish.

"Señor Roderiguez?"

"*Si.*"

"Is your wife Amelita Roderiguez?"

"*Si.* Who is this?"

"She is ill at the Padrasso ranch——"

"No? Ill—you say?"

"*Si*—she needs you."

Then he rang off. He was satisfied that the connection between the two was established.

Dennis went back to Santa Rosa with a plan developing in his head. Arrived, he rode at once to the Padrasso place, and asked for the señorita. She received him alone. He went straight to the point.

"Señorita, do you believe your guest to be your cousin?"

She fixed him with her far-seeing old eyes.

"Dennis Shawn, will you marry Amelita?" she asked.

"Marry her?" he exclaimed, startled at the idea.

"She is not my cousin. If you will marry her she may inherit——"

"My dear Señorita, I appreciate your kindness enormously, but the lady is already married, or if not, she ought to be!"

"What is this?"

'When did you first hear of her?"

"Roderiguez told me a young woman named Padrasso had just come to Los Angeles, looking for her relatives."

"When was this?"

"The night you met him here he told me."

He nodded.

"The woman is his wife—or his mistress. He is an employee of the Great Western Railroad, I feel absolutely certain. He has sent the woman to trap you into a will. Have you signed anything?"

She grinned.

"I am old—but no fool."

"Has she asked you to make a will in her favour?"

"Yes—that is why she is here"—simply.

"But you refuse?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with your ranch?" he asked her point blank.

"Dennis Shawn, when the Great Western Railroad and the Livingstons have ceased to war over my ranch and keep me amused—then I shall die."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What will you do about this woman?"

"I am old. You get rid of her."

Amelita came into the room at the moment.

"Ah, it is Mr. Shawn!" she exclaimed enthusiastically.

He made her a formal bow.

"Your business did not keep you long away from us."

"No, madame, it brought me back to you."

"Yes?"

"Your husband wants you, Señora Roderiguez. You'd better go back to him."

"What do you mean? You are insolent!" she cried.

"How long will it take you to pack your things?"

"Cousin Rita, will you let this man order your guest, your cousin, to go?"

The señorita could not hear her.

"There's no use. I know the whole story. Also some facts that would undoubtedly embarrass you, if told at L'Hotel Continental."

"You dirty spy! You can't threaten me! I'll stay right where I am and get my rights. I know what you want. I know why you hang around this old woman! You'll not get the ranch—it's mine and I'll fight for it," she shouted, becoming more and more excited.

He turned to the old lady, who looked on, with apparent amusement.

"Do you wish her to go?" he demanded.

She grinned and shrugged her shoulders.

"You see, she is too afraid of you to refuse. I shall stay and protect her. Oh, you have made me ill with your suspicions and your threats."

She ran out of the room into her bedroom. The door slammed and was locked. Dennis looked inquiringly at the old woman. She grinned and nodded. He followed to Amelita's door.

"If you are not gone by this time to-morrow, you will go with a policeman," he said quietly, at her keyhole.

"Go away! I am ill—I shall go to bed."

"Bed will not protect you, madame. This time to-morrow I will be here."

He went back to Señorita Padrasso and reported.

"No," she said, "send her now."

"She's gone to bed."

"Get her up."

He returned to the door.

"The señorita desires you to go now."

"I cannot. I am in bed."

"Get up and put on your clothes at once. Ten minutes—then I come in."

He telephoned Santa Rosa for Chuck to come with a motor car as fast as possible. Then he went back to the door.

"The car will be here shortly to take you to the station."

"I shall not get up."

Dennis looked at his watch. The old lady was standing in the doorway of the living room now, watching. When the ten minutes were up he walked out into the patio and climbed in Amelita's window. She gave an awful shriek, but he merely opened her door. He called to the maid who served Señorita and ordered her to dress the woman, who lay in the bed. It proved to be not so easy.

When Chuck arrived he found Dennis grimly holding upright the handsome Amelita, with her hands crossed behind her back, while the señorita and the maid tried to complete her toilet.

"Get her belongings into that trunk, Chuck—we're taking the lady on a motor trip."

She screamed, she bit, she scratched, and kicked, but somehow they got her more or less dressed, her clothes packed and strapped to the back of the motor. Then they carried her

out and put her in the back seat, where Dennis was forced to hold her, by main strength. Chuck sat in front to run the car. The señorita watched delightedly from the veranda.

"Señorita Padrasso, don't you want to kiss your only living cousin good-bye?" Chuck asked her.

She made a face at him.

"Where to, sir?" Chuck inquired, as they started off.

"We'll catch the train for Los Angeles at the village, or if the lady proves too troublesome, we'll drive to Los Angeles to Police Headquarters," said Dennis pleasantly.

Chuck let the car eat up the road toward the village. They put the sullen Señora Roderiguez on the train. Then Dennis sent a brief wire to Judge Tracey:

Counterfeit heiress on her way. Everything all right.
DENNIS SHAWN.

CHAPTER VI

A WEEK or so after the visit of the Spanish Amelita with Señorita Padrasso there began to appear certain signs of dissatisfaction among some of the men on Santa Rosa. Old Pinto, a Mexican Indian, began the trouble. He got very drunk one Saturday night and began shooting promiscuously, whereupon the company policeman shut him up in the guard house. A crowd of a dozen men demanded his release, and being refused, they stormed the cabin which served as jail. Shawn was appealed to, and came upon the scene just as they were battering down the door to release the Indian.

"Here, you fellows, what are you doing?" shouted Shawn.

"Company got no right to shut Pinto in guard house," called out one of the leaders.

"The company has the right to shut up anybody who gets drunk and threatens company property or the lives of other employees. Come away from that door!"

"Pinto got right to get drunk!"

"Shure he's got a right to if he can pay for the liquor, and behave himself while he's drunk. But he didn't. What's the matter with you fellows? Do you want crazy men running around shooting your women and children? You go on back to the quarters and act like men," urged Shawn.

There was no determined opposition. Obviously the leaders, whatever their motive, had no reply ready, so the men drifted off, for the most part rather sheepishly, and the incident would have passed unnoticed, had it not been the beginning of a series of such occurrences.

A few days later the trouble-makers rose from dinner, carried big platters of beans into the kitchen, dumped them on the table, and told the Chink Cook that if he served them beans again inside of two weeks they'd kill him. The cook immediately departed, as is the well-known way of Chinese cooks who brook no criticism. Shawn investigated the charge of the malcontents that the company food was cheap and poor. He urged the overseer, an Italian named Caproni, to find out what was at the bottom of the trouble and discharge the men who were disaffected. He, himself, ate at the men's mess, talked to some of the boys who

said the "grub was all right." He urged the new cook to "go easy with beans," and the camp settled down again—but not for long.

The next grievance was in regard to their pay envelopes. Williams usually went to the nearest town Friday night and brought out the pay-roll Saturday morning, so that the men were paid Saturday afternoon. Once or twice it happened that Williams had other ranch business to attend to, and failed to get back until Saturday evening, about the time of the men's supper. They worked up an excitement over this. They said it kept them from going to the town for supper and the night—the company had no right to hold back the money—they wanted it ready and waiting for them when they came in from work.

Williams tried to explain the situation to them, to assure them that it was just an accident and not a custom, but they grumbled about it and were not to be appeased.

At dinner that night Williams described all this to Dennis.

"Somebody is making trouble, Dennis," he added.

"Yes, you're right. I can't put my eyes on it yet but I'll find out who is at the bottom of this."

"Good work, old man! I hope we have the devil of a good fight before we're through with it. I'm just itching for a mix-up of some kind," cried Chuck.

"You don't think it is up to the Great Western again, do you?" Williams inquired.

"It may be. But I'm hanged if I can see what they've got to gain by upsetting our men. After all, what they want is the chance to get hold of the Padrasso acres. I wouldn't put anything beyond them to accomplish that, but how can trouble with our men help with that?"

"There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere," said Chuck. "What about Caproni and old Pinto? They're always chinning around together."

"I think Caproni is trustworthy. He's always got good results from the men. He gets along with them. I don't suspect him. I don't know about Pinto. He's a glum old fool."

"But he hath a daughter who is neither glum nor yet a fool," said Chuck, kissing his fingers.

"All right. Pump her, if you think she knows anything," laughed Dennis.

"'Tis yourself is the apple of her eye, Dennis Shawn," retorted the boy.

Shawn stared at him.

"You're crazy!" he remarked briefly.

"Crazy I may be, but I know 'the light that lies in woman's eyes,' which is more than you do, you old monk!"

"You turn your talents upon Señorita, Chuck. It's ridiculous we can't any of us find out what that old girl intends to do with her property."

"The chances are she'll will it to me, and you'll pay a pretty price for it then, my merry men," retorted Chuck.

"It's very pretty of you, my son, to confound me with the Livingston estate!" laughed Shawn.

There was a silence in which they smoked.

"Strange how nearly all the personal feuds and all the great wars of the world have had lust for land at the bottom of them. Wars of conquest, wars of empire, all because a monarch or a nation covets land," mused Williams.

"It's a natural human longing to own some acres of earth. Every man has it," Shawn answered.

"Man is born on the farm, goes to the city, and works all his life to be able to die on the farm," quoted Chuck. "Not for me, I'd rather die on Broadway!"

"I'd rather own the Santa Rosa than the

island of Manhattan with the State of New York thrown in!" declared Shawn.

"How long since you've been there, Dennis?"

"Ten years or so."

"Oh, well! They've fixed the island up some since you were there. You might like it better."

"No hope, Chuck. I can't stand humans all crowded in together in layers. I don't understand city folks, I guess—anyhow, I know I don't like 'em."

"I can't see that they're any different from any other 'folks'," protested Chuck. "I was brought up in a city. Is there any noticeable difference between Dennis and me, Williams?"

Williams smiled.

"Go on. Spit it out!"

"Well, if you insist, I should say that there is considerable difference between you and Dennis."

"Aw—you don't get me, Williams. I know Dennis is the king and I'm kind of a court fool. I only meant we think alike about most things."

"I can't agree to that. You're a modern sophisticated brat with that kind of a mind, and Dennis——"

"Here, here, you two—quit it! I won't be

analyzed, Williams. Every man is what his experience and his past have made him. Chuck's no exception—no more am I—nor you, either, if it comes to that——"

"Yes, let's get to Williams. Whatever soured him on the world and turned him into a bookworm, do you suppose?" said the irrepressible.

"Wine, women, and song, my son, what else?" said the dignified Williams, woman-hater and teetotaller.

"Let's get off this personal vein," said Dennis, quick to scent trouble.

"If you had your choice out of the whole world, where would you two fellows rather be to-night?" inquired Chuck.

"I'd rather be sitting in the loggia at Santa Rosa ranch," replied Dennis promptly.

"I'd rather be finishing a pipe preparatory to going indoors to read a critical study of modern poetry," said Williams.

"Gosh! You're about as romantic as a couple of gouty old goats!" exploded Chuck.

"Fire away—Chuck, where would you rather be?" smiled Dennis.

"Oh, sitting on my thumb!" retorted Chuck crossly, and wandered away to the house.

"The kid is lonesome," remarked Williams.

"Yes—restless again. Doesn't know what he wants."

Presently they heard him at the piano. Then his young, ardent voice floated out to them:

"When I awake—
If there be an awaking
I'll know what lulled me to sleep—
The touch of your lips on my mouth."

The two men sat on in the patio smoking, each stirred by the boy's restless spirit. Williams turned his memory away from his past and faced his barren future. Dennis let his thoughts wander toward a sort of mythical woman—who might be for him. Would her lips ever call him from death as they did the lover in the song? Where was she to-night, this predestined woman? Did she dream of him? He looked about the courtyard with its vine-covered walls—the light streaming from the kitchen on one side and from the room where Chuck was singing. Overhead the sky was pierced with millions of points of light. Would she love Santa Rosa as he did? He sighed deeply.

"You said it," remarked the other man, rising. "After all, the modern poets are saner—they write about street cars and machine shops and

such things. Here are two volumes—you'd better try one."

Dennis laughed.

"Much obliged. Think I'll go for a ride and stretch my legs."

The music indoors stopped.

"Hi, there, you Chuck—come for a ride," called Dennis.

"You're on," came the answer.

Dennis went on down toward the stables. He almost collided with a figure which came suddenly out of some underbrush.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

"Me—Kate——" came the answer.

"Oh—good evening—Kate."

"Evening. Don't go walk alone," she said.

"Why not?"

"Me—I tell you—don't go walk alone."

"I'm not afraid," he laughed. "Besides, I'm going to ride, and my horse will protect me."

Chuck came whistling along toward them.

"Chuck—he go ride?" said Kate. "Ah—good."

"He'll take care of me, Kate," Dennis assured her.

He saw her white teeth shine in the darkness. She was gone, as she came, before Chuck caught up.

They saddled their horses and rode off cross country, the ponies picking their way carefully. As they passed the quarters, Dennis commented on the quiet.

"Must be a boxing match or something doing."

They rode in silence for a while. The quiet hills rolled away to the sky, as if they supported the deep blue, gold-shot tapestry. The quiet was as palpable as noise. They trotted along side by side. Presently they came to the Padrasso estate and rode up near enough to the house to speak with the guards Dennis had established there. There was only one light in the ranch house, from an upstairs room.

"The señorita has retired, alas!" said Chuck. "Not a girl around here for me to woo."

"I wonder what's become of that old Spanish Fandango Roderiguez we chased off the place that night," laughed Dennis.

"We'll met him again, don't you worry."

"Worry is not in my line, my boy."

They ran their horses along a level stretch and then headed up over the hills, cross country toward their own ranch. As they descended a hill they saw a fire.

"What's that?" demanded Dennis.

It was a remote spot, out of the way of any chance passerby. There was a bonfire burning and the flames threw into high light a man standing and what looked like many men seated about.

At a gesture from Dennis they stopped and dismounted. At the sudden memory of Kate's warning, he looked at his revolver, to see that it was loaded, before he led the way toward the men about the fire. When they came near enough to hear what the speaker was saying, they crouched low and listened.

The man who was speaking was none other than the señorita's caller whom they had escorted off the ranch. He told the men that when the Señorita Padrasso died, her five thousand acres in the heart of the Santa Rosa would become the property of the Great Western Railroad. That big wages would be paid by that company, fine quarters put up for the men, a movie theatre would be built there, a motor bus would run to town Saturday nights. The Santa Rosa men would be given the first chance at the jobs through Caproni, who was in the pay of the Great Western at this moment. He would be notified the moment the Great

Western took possession, and he would be authorized to begin to hire the men.

In the meantime, he told them, it would be advisable to get rid of Dennis Shawn. He had been superintendent at Santa Rosa so long that he identified the Livingston estate interests with his own. A less conscientious manager would be easier to handle when the change came. He had such a man in mind. It might even be well to start a series of threats against Shawn to try to scare him off.

Here Dennis made an impulsive move, and only Chuck's quick clutch on his arm kept him quiet.

Old Pinto rose.

"Me, I will tie Shawn on a horse—with hees face to the tail, an' run him off the ranch —you say so?"

"No," Caproni answered. "When I want him run off I'll do it myself. You keep out of this."

Various suggestions were made as to how best to terrify Shawn. One man volunteered the information that you might as well try to frighten the devil—Shawn was Irish and afraid of nothing.

Dennis chuckled at that.

They finally decided to give Dennis a warning. A watch was to be kept and when he was found alone the next night, he was to be summoned to quarters, as if in an emergency. On the way there he was to be seized and carried to a certain abandoned cabin, where masked men would await him. They would give him his choice of going to Los Angeles of his own free will or going over the mountains on foot, with a guard.

"You'll have to handle that pup that always follows him," said the speaker who had deprecated Shawn's fears.

"Well, that won't take a dozen men," sneered the Spanish-speaking gentleman.

This time it was Dennis who clapped a hand on the other's mouth. He pulled Chuck back and up the hills to where the horses were. Silently they mounted and rode up the way they had come. When it was safe to speak, Dennis said in a soft voice:

"Chuck, me boy, there's fun ahead! Praise be, we can fight that fool in the open now."

"What'll you do to-morrow night?"

"Do, me child—God knows what I'll do! But the important thing is I'll be there!" lilted Shawn.

"And Dennis was there,
With his pup at his heels,"

sang Chuck softly.

With a laugh of sheer joy they galloped off to the ranch.

CHAPTER VII

THE announcement was made of the engagement of Marcia Livingston to Clarke Jessup, and the papers had pages of the history of the two famous families and of the vast wealth the marriage would combine. There were pictures and drawings and snapshots of the happy couple, alone and together. The Toy Theatre came in for much advertisement, and finally Marcia refused to look at a paper, daily or weekly, she was so bored with the publicity they were exposed to.

"Why do you bother, old girl? I never read the filthy sheets!" Clarke said when she complained of it to him.

There began interminable dinners and teas in honour of the engagement, and night after night Clarke brought her home at midnight, dutifully kissed her good-night, and went his way. For about three weeks Marcia bore the celebration like a lady, and then she revolted. She sent hurried excuses to her hostesses, and a wire to Clarke, saying she had

been called away and would send an address later.

Whereupon she retired in solitary state to the upper floors of her house, gave strict orders to the servants that no one was to be admitted except Mary Jane Paul, that they were to say to all inquiries that Miss Livingston was out of town.

She summoned Miss Paul by telephone.

"I can't come to-day, Marcia, we've got a dress rehearsal at the Toy Theatre and I've got one million things to do at the school."

"You'd better come," her employer threatened darkly.

"Is anything the matter?"

"There is!"

"Serious?"

"Very."

"All right, I'll come."

Some hours later Miss Paul was ushered in. She supposed that the house, closed and shuttered, presaged Marcia's departure to Europe, or her country place. It was a hot day and the dark, cool halls were soothing after the glare outside. On a chaise-longue in her charming sitting room lay Marcia, with a book face down on her lap. An electric fan breezed be-

side her—a carafe, frosted with chilled drink of some kind, stood in reach of her hand.

She greeted Mary Jane.

"What is it?" asked her guest briskly. "Are you ill?"

"Take off your hat and have some of that cool stuff to drink. You may as well make yourself comfortable and relax, because you are a prisoner."

Miss Paul laughed, obeyed, and inquired:

"What's all this foolishness? Prisoner? Have you committed a crime, Marcia?"

"No such luck. I'm in hiding, that's all, and I'm not going to do it alone."

"But you have to hide *from* somebody? Who is it?"

Miss Paul took a large chair, put her feet up on a footstool, and sipped her drink appreciatively. Marcia looked at her, but made no answer.

"Is it your lover?" she demanded.

"My what?" said Marcia. "Oh, do you mean Clarke?"

She laughed spontaneously at the idea of his being a lover.

"Naturally I mean Clarke. You're going to marry him, aren't you? It's natural to suppose

he is your lover, isn't it?" demanded Miss Paul, somewhat tartly.

"I suppose it is"—with a sigh.

"Then you *are* hiding from him."

"Ye-es—from him and those everlasting dinners where we meet the same people and all say the same things——"

"Look here, Marcia, let's get down to truth about this business. Are you in love with this man?"

"N—no."

"You certainly aren't marrying him for money or position!"

"No."

"Then why in the name of sense did you get engaged to him?"

"Well, it was a rainy Sunday and we both were blue, and lonesome——"

Mary Jane stared at her a moment and then she threw back her head and shouted with laughter. Marcia watched her, interested, but not amused.

"Of all the ridiculous things! It was just a sort of joke, then, was it?"

"No. Clarke has been asking me to marry him once or twice a year for years. I don't see what difference it makes whether I marry him or not—do you?"

"If you don't love him, I should say it made considerable difference. Have you ever loved any man, Marcia?"

"No—not exactly. I loved a man on a steamer once, but I didn't meet him."

"I'm serious. If you don't love this man, it is a sin for you to go on with this," Mary Jane said firmly.

"Will you tell me what I'm to do, then? I've done everything I can think of and it all bores me. I've been everywhere in the world, and there's nothing left but to marry——"

"Yes—but you don't need to marry this man."

"Well, he isn't brilliant perhaps, but he's average of our class——"

"Average nothing! He makes me think of Tolstoi's 'Living Corpse.' He never had a thrill in his life—he's simply dead. Why, I'd rather marry a street sweeper!"

"Maybe I would—but I don't know any."

"This cursed money!" cried Mary. "If you would only have terrible reverses and lose it—then you'd have a chance!"

"Do you think it's the money, Mary Jane? Isn't it our times? Hasn't the war taken the zest out of living? Hasn't dry rot set in, in my class?"

"Perhaps—and you don't use any brains to save yourselves. You marry and intermarry, you rich, just like royal families, with the same results. You go out and marry the man with a hoe and have some sturdy peasant babies——"

"You keep on mentioning these interesting gentlemen, the street sweeper and the man with the hoe, but what good does that do me? Can I go and say—'Dear sir, I am a very rich young woman who wants strong peasant babies. Will you oblige me by marrying me and acting as the other parent?'"

Mary Jane sighed.

"Of course, in a way, that nonsense is true. But you could meet men outside this country-club, polo-playing set, if you made up your mind to."

"How?"

"Go and live simply, in some place where you aren't known."

"My dear Mary Jane, without undue boasting I may remind you that my face has ornamented the public prints of the country to the exclusion of even moving-picture actresses for four weeks. I'm at least as well known as Mary Pickford."

Again Mary Jane sighed.

"You won't work——"

"No, I won't. I hate it. If I could bear the thought of work I'd go to your artists' colony and get them to take me in—but I can't. I want to be waited on—I want my breakfast in bed. I want all the tiresome details of living looked after by somebody else——"

"And there you are! It's a vicious circle——"

"Leading back to Clarke Jessup?"

Mary Jane made no answer.

"Doesn't it?"

"Why have you run away if you intend to marry him?"

"Well—I suppose when we're married I'll face the fact that he bores me as part of my life——"

"But you won't! You've never put up with being bored in your life. You have always bolted. You've had no discipline. You're selfish and pampered and you'll bolt again, but this time with the scandal of divorce as the price——"

"You're a cheerful cell-mate. I didn't bring you here to paint a roseate picture like that——"

"What did you bring me for?"

"To—to——"

Suddenly two large tears began a slow descent on the girl's cheeks.

"Don't mind about them—it's heat and nerves and everything," she said, scorning to wipe the offending eyes.

"Sorry I was so brutal—but my main use to you, Marcia, is that I'm the sole and only person who tells you the truth about yourself."

"You do—you certainly do!"

"You have to admit, also, that I know your true worth better than anybody else."

"Have I a true worth, Mary Jane?"

"I couldn't bother with you if you hadn't. I'm really very fond of you, you know."

"So far as I'm aware, you're the only true friend I've got."

"How long do you propose to stay up here in retreat?"

"A week or two. You'd better telephone the office that you've gone on a vacation."

"Can't be done. I'll stay here nights, if you like. I may even manage a half day now and then, but I wouldn't give up being in on these last touches at the school for anything," said Mary Jane decisively.

Marcia begged and cajoled and threatened, but in vain. So it was arranged that Mary Jane was to take off all the time she could from Miss Livingston's affairs, to spend it in Miss

Livingston's company. Every morning the working woman set out cheerfully for her job, while her employer killed time with a late breakfast and improvised tasks.

At night they dined in Marcia's sitting room, and about ten o'clock they would set out on foot to walk uptown for some exercise, or they would get in a little racing car and Marcia would drive them out into the country. Once when the girl was especially restless they drove all night, watched the sun come up, and went to bed in the broad daylight.

They talked the whole world round in their many hours together, but by mutual instinct they avoided the subject of Marcia's engagement.

Mary Jane Paul thought about it a great deal. It seemed to her a grievous mistake, and yet given the situation, the girl's training or lack of it, and her money, it seemed hideously inevitable. This man or that, it made little difference perhaps, if he must be chosen from this particular group. So absorbed did she become in Marcia's problem that she went along the streets looking for the kind of man she felt the girl should marry. She began to understand, in these days they spent together,

that the new school could not fill her life any more than the Toy Theatre had—that something personal, vital, dynamic must come to her, if she was to be saved. Otherwise, one more beautiful, feverish, unsatisfied woman would be be added to the list of rich young matrons.

"Mary Jane, when do you expect to put the finishing touches to the school?" Marcia asked her one night.

"The day we open," the other smiled.

"What is the date on which your outrageous conscience will allow you to leave the building—to put it exactly?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Is there any way to find out?"

"I suppose I might—approximately. Why?"

"I'll tell you why when you find out," teased Marcia.

The next night she gave an approximate date.

"Good! The Saturday after that you and I are going to sail for Europe."

"Marcia, I can't afford any such extravagance," interrupted the other.

"I was taught that it was rude to interrupt! You will go, Miss Paul, as manager of the new school to investigate similar institutions on the continent. It will be purely a business trip

and, as such, expenses will be paid by your employer."

"Marcia, you old dear, you're just making this an excuse——"

"I'm making a business proposition, Miss Paul."

"I accept it with hallelujahs, Miss Livingston."

"My idea is to stay in my retreat until we sail. Then I'll write from the other side as if we'd been there all the time."

"Marcia, are you being quite fair to Mr. Jessup?"

"It will be fairer to him, in the end, for me not to see much of him until I'm married to him, Mary Jane."

"It's your affair, of course."

So it was decided upon, and the plans made. They sailed the first of August by the southern route to France. The war had crippled artistic endeavour, of course, for five years, but there were still some interesting survivals, and one or two modern efforts at a training that would develop the artist of the stage in an all-round way. For a month or so they devoted themselves to these investigations, and then Marcia insisted on a play time. Mary Jane yearned

for mountains, so they went into Switzerland for a while. Then back to France, where they rented a motor and drifted about in the south, keeping clear of the region of battlefields.

It was Mary Jane's first trip to Europe and she was in a state of delight all the time. On the steamer going over she warned Marcia that she intended to search Europe for a proper husband for her, and it was her deadly intention to come between Marcia and her fiancé, if it could be done. This idea had provided them with endless amusement on their travels. They were always discussing the marital possibilities of men wherever they met them. On the motor trip, Marcia would stop the car, summon a likely looking French peasant at work in the fields, and after asking him some unnecessary directions, she would turn to Mary Jane and say:

"Would he do? Shall we capture him?"

Then with shrieks of laughter they would leave the bewildered farmer by the roadside, shaking his head with a muttered, "*Les bettises Américains!*"

Marcia repeatedly stated that it was her most successful trip, that she was like a prisoner out on parole, and that she was having the

time of her life, before the doors finally clanged to behind her.

"Cheerful view of marriage!" commented Mary Jane.

"I believe you're quite sentimental about marriage, Mary Jane," Marcia accused her.

"I am—quite."

In late September they turned their faces homeward, because the school was to open on October 15th and there were many preliminaries for Mary Jane to arrange.

"Well," said she as they came in sight of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour, "it has been a perfect trip, all but the husband. Who would have thought that it was so difficult to find just a plain, common garden variety of man?"

CHAPTER VIII

DENNIS and Chuck burst in upon Williams, placidly reading the modern poets.

"Chuck the poet, old top, we've got a mountain feud on our hands!" cried the boy excitedly.

Williams looked up and asked in his serious way:

"What are you raving about, Chuck?"

"While you've been reading your bally poets, Denny and I have been to a meeting of the Ku-Klux Klan, where we learned, happily, that we were to be the favoured objects of their immediate attention!"

Williams shook his head and Dennis laughed.

"English it for me, Dennis," he urged.

Dennis told him the story of their adventure. He listened intently, asking a question now and then or making some comment.

"Were you near enough to identify the men?"

"I saw a good many faces," Dennis answered, and named possibly a dozen men.

"You say this agent deliberately announced Caproni to be a spy?"

"He did!" quoth Chuck. "I hope in the final pickings I get Caproni!"

Williams turned an anxious face to Shawn.

"This is certainly serious, Dennis. What do you propose to do?"

"I propose to be kidnapped," smiled the Irishman, lighting his pipe.

"That is folly. They might kill you."

"Not on your life."

"I'm in this, too. I'm referred to as 'the pup' and I'm scheduled for capture," boasted Chuck.

"You cannot count on their carrying out the plan exactly, Dennis. A lot of lawless dagoes and hunkies, masked and out of hand—they might carry you two fellows up in the mountains and knife you," Williams protested.

"Or hold us for ransom! By gracious!—I feel like somebody at last. Beautiful blond boy carried to mountains by banditti and held for ransom!"

"Shut up, Chuck, and let me think," murmured Dennis.

Dennis wandered out to the veranda.

"Williams, my dear, you'd better join us

to-morrow night. *Do* noble deeds—not dream them all day long! It may be some party!" Chuck teased the older man.

"It is sometimes dangerous to be as funny as you can be, English," he replied with ominous calm.

"Help!" howled Chuck, hurrying off to bed.

The next morning when Dennis strolled out to breakfast he came upon Harry Williams cleaning a revolver. Wong crossed the patio, gazed at the unwonted sight, and smiled before he slipped to the kitchen. Williams never looked up—he was absorbed in the work.

"Well, old man, going to war?" laughed Dennis.

"I'm in on this fight, Dennis," he answered.

"Can you shoot?" Shawn asked him curiously.

"You bet your life I can shoot! What do you take me for—a mollycoddle?" cried Williams, with the first show of heat he had ever exhibited to Shawn.

"I do not," said he. "We'll certainly need you, Williams."

Chuck came out of the house.

"Holy Christian fathers!" he cried. "Be careful with that gun, Williams!"

"Shut up!" ordered Williams. "I'm in on this party, and I don't want any more talk from you."

Chuck stared.

"Gosh, you're a regular feller," he said. "Let's eat."

After breakfast Dennis said:

"I've got an idea. You fellows come along with me this morning, will you? We'll talk as we ride."

Later they set off. Chuck watched Williams out of the corner of his eyes, and saw that he was no stranger to a horse, although he had always refused to ride. He kept his jocular comments to himself, however, for there was a gleam in Williams's eye that boded ill for the humorist.

Dennis led them off toward the sawmill.

"These fellows at the mill are loyal to us, I think. I'm dead sure of McKim, the foreman. I thought we'd organize a little masked ball of our own, just to provide dancing partners for the kidnappers," he explained.

"Whoopee!" yelled Chuck ecstatically.

"I'll get McKim to call out some men who can fight and who can be relied on, and we'll just tell them the situation."

"Good idea," commented Williams.

"While Chuck and I are getting ourselves kidnapped, you'll captain these other fellows, Williams, and be ready for a rescue."

"I'll be there"—quietly.

" 'Harry was there with his hair in a braid,' " sang Chuck. " 'Pologize old man, but I'm so full of joy I'm not responsible for what I say. Nobody must take offence."

Williams laughed.

They rode up the hill and Chuck went in search of McKim. He was a thickset little Irishman, gentle as a kitten most of the time and ready to fight all comers when he was mad. He was a favourite with the men, just as Shawn was.

"Good mornin', Mr. Shawn," he said, grinning with pleasure. He nodded to Williams. "Are ye coming in, sor?"

This because Dennis was dismounting, Williams following suit.

"Look here, McKim, have ye got any trouble makers down here among your men?"

"Not so's ye'd notice," grinned McKim.

"The men are satisfied—they're loyal to the company?"

"They are—or they quit!"

"We've got the devil of a mess up at the other

camp. The Great Western wants to grab the Padrasso Ranch, when the señorita dies, and they're laying their plans for it now. They've got a spy working our men up, and last night English and I listened in on a plan to get rid of me as superintendent and manager of Santa Rosa——"

"The ——!" burst out McKim.

"They're going to kidnap me to-night and scare the life out of me so I'll leave the ranch——"

"Of all the ——!"

"Exactly! Well, we thought we'd give them a run for their money. You haven't got a dozen fellows or so who can fight, have you?"

"Have I? Wait wan minute, Mr. Shawn."

McKim bolted into the mill so fast that his bowlegs fairly twinkled. The three men smiled. In ten minutes he was back with fifteen huskies, who looked a little anxious at being summoned by the manager.

"You go far to pick a better bunch than this, Mr. Shawn," said McKim.

Dennis nodded.

"Boys, I want some help to-night to wind up some dirty business. We've got some sneaks up at the other camp who are going to try to run me off the ranch."

"For the love o' Mike!" said one of the men simply.

"I guess I'll stick to Santa Rosa for a while. The idea is this: Chuck and I are to be grabbed to-night and carried off to that cabin up in the hills we use for a hunting camp——"

Heads were nodded.

"There we are to be threatened, scared within an inch of our lives and we promise to leave at once——"

A loud guffaw interrupted him.

"Exactly! You get the idea. Our thought was that if Mr. Williams here and a bunch of you fellows were in hiding round the cabin, we might get *them* to promise to leave at once——"

More laughter.

"We'll be there, Mr. Shawn," said McKim.

"Oh, you'd better not mix in, McKim. Send your men. I don't want to lose a good foreman," began Dennis.

"Mr. Shawn, would he be takin' mother's milk from a babe? 'Tis nary a fight I've had for long an' long," murmured the Irishman.

"All right, McKim, suit yourself," laughed Shawn. "Bring some masks, boys, so we can fool 'em, and do as Williams tells you, because we will work out the plan and the signals and

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everything in advance. Beat 'em up a bit, but no shooting. Each fellow will take a man on his horse, we'll give them a rough ride way over to the edge of nowhere, and start them for town on foot. Do you get me?"

"We do, sir"—with much laughter.

"Good! Be ready at dark. Mr. Williams will ride down here for you. Much obliged to you," grinned Dennis.

"'Tis obliged we are to you, sor," cried McKim.

The three conspirators mounted and rode off.

"So far so good," said Williams.

"So far much better!" amended Chuck.

"Let's go back by way of the nursery and have a few words with that lousy traitor, Caproni," suggested Dennis.

They came to the nursery acres where the small trees were set. Caproni came to speak to them. Dennis asked him some questions about the work, and he answered most affably. The other men rested on their shovels and looked at the trio sullenly.

"Gosh, I'm glad we're on to this plot! I wouldn't enjoy it half so much if they were springing this on us," remarked Chuck to Williams, under his breath.

"Pretty tough-looking customers, all right," William agreed.

They rode back to the ranch house at noon.

"We'll do some letters this afternoon, Williams, and work out the rest of the plan. You can take a half day off, Chuck!"

"Much obliged. I'd like to rest up for evening. I've never been kidnapped before and I want to be all fresh to enjoy it."

They laughed at him, he was so like an excited little boy going to the circus.

It was finally decided that Williams should set off alone for the mill while the men in quarters were at their supper. He was to have his forces ambushed and ready when the kidnappers and their prisoners arrived. The signal for the rescue party was to be a call from Dennis of "Help-Help-Help!" They were to rush in, overpower the ruffians, and carry them off. In the meantime Dennis and Chuck were to deliberately expose themselves to capture, by riding away from the house, past quarters.

When Wong called them to dinner they were all sharp-set for the adventure. They talked and laughed and joked each other with unwonted ardour. They lit their pipes and smoked hard for some minutes. Then Williams rose.

"Well, I'm off. 'Help' three times is the signal for attack, and we ride northeast after we get our man."

"Right. See you later," grinned Dennis.

"For heaven's sake, now, Chuck, don't be funny with those fellows and get your throat cut."

"Harvey, your concern for my safety is a moving thing! Get along, and good fighting to you, old buck!"

Williams grinned and left them. Chuck went indoors, and Dennis smoked alone in the patio. Presently he saw a figure creeping along close to the wall, inside the court. He put his hand on his revolver.

"Don't shoot—me—Kate," said a voice in a whisper.

"What do you want?" harshly.

"Don't go way from ranch house to-night."

"Come here, Kate," he ordered.

She glanced around, then rose and walked toward him.

It is difficult to say what mixture of blood ran in Kate's veins. It seemed impossible that old Pinto could be her father. She was straight and slim and young. Her skin was not brown like a Mexican's, but it was smooth like deep-toned

ivory. Great black eyes stared, unblinking, from this background—her hair was black, shining, and straight. She came toward Dennis with the free swing of the primitive.

"What are all these warnings, Kate?" Dennis asked her.

"Trouble for you—don't go way to-night."

"But who is making the trouble, Kate? Is it Pinto?"

"Pinto old devil," she replied.

"Granted—but what does he want?"

"Don't know."

"Does Caproni know who's at the bottom of this?"

"Don't know," she shrugged.

"Won't they punish you if they find out you warned me?"

She shrugged again, but made no answer.

"Won't they?" he insisted.

He took her by the shoulders and turned her so he could see her face. She was trembling.

"Kate, old Pinto will beat you for this."

"Don't care."

"But why should you risk a beating for me?"

"Kate love Dennis Shawn," she said simply.

He dropped his hands from her shoulders quickly, startled by her words. Suddenly her

arms were about his neck, her body was pressed close to his, and her red lips were lifted to him.

"Kate love Dennis Shawn," she repeated. "Dennis take Kate."

She drew his head down to her, and he kissed her.

"I say, Denny," called Chuck and came upon them suddenly. "Holy mackerel—I apologize!"

Dennis loosened the girl's arms.

"Kate risked a beating, maybe worse, to warn me," he said.

"Good old Kate! She deserves the reward she got—and more," remarked Chuck.

"Dennis Shawn thanks you, Kate."

"You not go away to-night?"

"I'll not go far, Kate. It will be all right. You're not to worry. Understand, nothing will happen to me. I'll be protected."

"No—no—don't go," she begged, clinging to him.

"I must. Here—you go in there and wait," he said, pointing to the living room of the ranch house.

She turned to appeal to Chuck.

"It's all right, Kate. We're on!" he grinned.

She went into the house then. The two men strolled off to the stables.

"Plucky of the little devil. They'd skin her alive if they knew," said Chuck.

"Yes."

"She's a beauty, Dennis. She's crazy about you. Why don't you take her?" asked the boy.

"Can't be done. As soon as you mix up with their women, you lose authority over the men."

"Gosh! Authority over the men could go hang if that beauty made love to me like that. Didn't you want her?"

"Yes. I'd like to have flung her over my saddle and made off with her," said Dennis grimly, but he was breathing hard. Chuck suddenly realized what loyalty to his trust meant to this man. The good of the Santa Rosa was first in his life.

They strolled, walking their horses slowly past the quarters. There was no singing tonight, only a grim silence pervaded the place. Even the slatternly wives were quiet.

Dennis and Chuck rode a mile and a half before they heard the horses behind them. They slowed down to a walk.

"I feel like a débutante at her first ball," whispered Chuck, just before the masked riders overtook and surrounded them.

They were swiftly dismounted, gagged, their

arms tied, their revolvers taken from them; they were set back on their horses, which were led by the two leaders.

In silence the procession moved on toward the cabin. Not a word had been spoken so far. Dennis looked over at Chuck and the boy winked at him.

Arrived at the cabin they were led in and the gags taken off. The men made a circle about them and the leader began to speak. He was undoubtedly the Spanish-speaking gentleman.

"I've brought you fellows up here to tell you that we give you just twenty-four hours to clear out of Santa Rosa. You can take your choice between goin' on the Limited to Frisco, or settin' off on a rail with a guard."

"You frighten me!" said Dennis in Spanish.

Chuck laughed.

"Cut that out! I can't be responsible for these fellows—they may decide to string you two up to-night and be done with it——"

"Help! Help! Help!" cried Dennis wildly.

It seemed as if McKim must have been shot out of a catapult, he came through the door so hard and so fast. The others tumbled in behind him. They shouted greetings to Caproni and the men, which threw them off the scent

for a second. They had all drawn guns—but they did not shoot. In that second the newcomers each picked a man and went for him. The first move was to disarm them, and all at once the cabin was a a writhing mass of arms and legs and cursing humans. The one lantern was broken and the fight was in the dark. As fast as Dennis's men, who outnumbered the others, could manage it, they roped the arms of the captured behind them. One or two shots went astray, but it was a regular hand-to-hand affair. When a man was roped, he was dragged out and slung on a horse in front of his captor. The number grew slowly but surely. Williams managed to get Caproni on his horse, Chuck was struggling with Pinto, and Dennis was sweating and fighting the Spanish gentleman when a shot was fired from behind him. The man rolled over with a groan. From somewhere a hand felt for Dennis.

"Dennis Shawn—where are you, Dennis Shawn?"

"Kate! You fool!" he cried.

She touched him, feeling him swiftly for wounds.

"I'm all right. Here, boys, take this fellow out. Better look him over, he's hurt."

Two men carried Roderiguez out into the light of a torch.

Dennis turned to the figure crouching beside him.

"Kate, I'm safe. Ride back now to the ranch."

"Can't go—my horse gone home," she replied.

He picked her up and ran out with her.

"Go ahead, boys. Ride like hell to the northwest and head them toward Los Angeles," cried Dennis. "The others will follow!"

The cavalcade started on the gallop—and behind them all came Dennis Shawn with Kate on the saddle before him. She sat sidewise, her head upon his breast, and she held him with one arm about his neck, but his thoughts were not for her until Santa Rosa's cause was served. Through the night the horses ran, with now and then a wild decisive whoop from the conquerors. The stars paled and dawn threw out sprays of light, but still they galloped on.

CHAPTER IX

MARCIA and Mary Jane Paul returned to New York, the former with the feeling that play time was over, and that the subject of her marriage and of new responsibilities must be faced, the latter with the joyous anticipation of hard labour at the work she loved.

Clarke met them on the pier, with a characteristic greeting:

"Hello, old girl—glad to see you back."

His man looked after their luggage, and he carried them off to lunch; Mary Jane protested, but he was insistent that she join them, and in Marcia's nervous entreaties she heard a call for help. So she made a third at the reunion of these lovers who had been parted for four months, and instead of feeling herself a vile interloper, she felt rather like the raft the drowning clung to.

She found herself rather sorry for the man. In his strange, impassive way, she believed he was fond of Marcia. She tried to look at

the girl with the eyes of a stranger. Marcia was very lovely to look upon. That was obvious enough. She was vivid and full of life when she was interested. She was perfectly dressed and yet her clothes expressed her—she was not by any means a manikin. There was everything, certainly, to attract this type of man—and yet what a pity that he would never know what sweetness and sympathy and understanding lay beneath the surface! What courage and spirit lay dormant behind the restless, seeking creature that was Marcia Livingston to her world!

Her world, however, was satisfied with what it saw. It found Marcia amusing and it swallowed her up promptly upon her return.

When she had been home for a fortnight she had a telephone call one day from Judge Horace Tracey, one of the executors of the estate, and her friend from childhood, as he had been her father's.

"Welcome home, Marcia," his cordial voice said to her over the wire. "I've been trying to run in and see you ever since I heard you were back, but I don't seem to manage it."

"I'll come to see you, Judge," she offered.

"I hoped you would say that. I really

want to talk to you about your affairs. I suppose you will be getting married soon, now——"

"Oh—yes—I suppose so."

"I want you to have your business well in mind before your husband complicates things."

"Clarke won't complicate things. I won't let him. He can look after his affairs and you and I'll look after mine."

"Here speaks the modern woman!" laughed the Judge. "When will you come?"

They decided upon four o'clock of the following afternoon, and after some banter and teasing about the new school which was much in the public print, the Judge rang off.

When she was ushered into his private office the next day, he came to meet her with both hands out, and she gave him a daughterly hug and kiss.

"Well, little Marcia!" he said, holding her off to look into her eyes.

"Well, Judge Horace!" she answered, smiling.

"So you're going to marry Clarke, are you?"

"Yes, it seems to be on the books."

He avoided comment by offering her a chair.

"You don't approve?"

"Well, I don't know that there is anything to disapprove of in Clarke Jessup. He's decent

enough of his kind—but somehow his kind isn't just what I'd pick out for you."

"What kind *would* you pick for me, Judge?"

"I'd like to see you marry a regular man," he responded.

"Poor Clarke," she smiled.

He laughed.

"If you love the fellow, I suppose that settles it."

"It would. I don't know much about love, Judge Horace."

"Tut-tut, you've had suitors since you were fifteen."

"That doesn't count. I mean the real thing —the thou-and-I-and-the-world-well-lost kind of thing."

"Hm—sadly enough, that kind seems rather out of date, doesn't it? Our young people seem to be a practical lot. They won't let sentiment interfere with business," he sighed.

"I hate the age we live in, Judge Horace!" she said hotly. "I wish we had gone down into barbarism completely during the war! We're over-civilized—over-everything. I'm sick of it!"

He looked at her so anxiously, with such puzzled tenderness, that she laughed outright.

"It's all right, old dear! I'm letting off

steam. Bring on your debits and credits and balance sheets and let us contemplate my unearned riches."

"Marcia, you aren't leaning toward Socialism?"—anxiously.

"I don't know what it means."

"Well, don't let the cranks get hold of you. You're so fond of experiments," he protested.

"Don't worry. Do I have to hear about all that?" she objected, pointing to piles of reports and documents.

"Not in any detail. You say you don't intend to have Clarke interfering, but, of course, he has a legal right to do so."

"I won't have him in on my affairs," she said stubbornly.

"The one thing I am most anxious to have unchanged is the management of Santa Rosa Ranch. You know, of course, that the greater part of your income is derived from that source, and it would be a real calamity to have Dennis Shawn removed from there."

"Judge, you would think this man with the impossible name was your favourite son!" she laughed.

"Would to heaven he were! *There* is a man!"

"Yes, I know—the true type of honest Ameri-

can—you always get them in the movies," she jeered. "Great, uncouth, God's noblemen, with grand hearts and no manners——"

The Judge flashed with impatience.

"You put Dennis Shawn up against Clarke Jessup, and give yourself a good laugh," he said hotly.

"Well, I'm not going to! I never have seen this 99 per cent. hero of yours and I don't intend to. I promise you, however, to keep him on till he dies of old age, as manager of Santa Rosa, just out of affection for you, if nothing else."

"Dennis Shawn is a gentleman, don't forget that. He's the grandson of your grandfather's most influential enemy."

"I promise never to lose this treasure!"

"You'll serve your own best interests if you don't. We've had plenty of managers in your father's day, but we never had a Dennis Shawn, let me tell you."

"How long has he been there?"

"Let me see—Dennis is thirty-five now. I took him on when he was twenty-five—that's ten years."

He turned suddenly and looked at her.

"I may have to go out to Santa Rosa this fall. Come with me, Marcia."

"Oh, no. I can't. I've got lots of things to do here—besides, I hate the place. I went once when I was a little girl, with Father, and it rained all the time, and I was afraid of the Chinese cook. Oh, I hated it!"

"I may not go," mused the Judge, "I may get Dennis on here."

"What about the old Spanish woman—is she dead yet?"

"No, Dennis has just disposed of an heiress who presented herself."

He laughed, rummaged in a drawer, and drew forth the letter and the telegram, which he offered her. She read them.

"Poor heiress! Your Shawn sounds quite the Cave Man."

"Dennis doesn't strike one as an effete person," he smiled.

"Get on to the fact. I'm sick of your hero," she teased him.

"We joke about this old Spanish woman, and yet she really can be said to hold your fate in her hands," the Judge mused.

"How?"—startled.

"It was a pretty big gamble old Henry Livingston started with the Santa Rosa."

"Do I know about it?"

"I told you when you were twenty-one."

"Mercy! I'd never remember all this time."

"You ought to—it grows more important as the stubborn old woman nears her end. We can't get any agreement out of her as to what she intends to do with her property, and unless we get it, at her death the whole of Santa Rosa's title may be invalidated."

"Really—how?"

"The Padrasso Ranch is the centre of the original Spanish grant. When your grandfather bought up the surrounding country, he found he could not get clear title unless he acquired that original five thousand acres. He took a chance on it—your father tried to get a settlement with old Padrasso, and then his granddaughter and we've been trying to do so ever since his death."

"But why won't she sell? She could stay in her old house till she died, couldn't she?"

"Yes. We've offered big sums—any concessions. She's old and queer and she tells Dennis that it amuses her to have the Great Western and the Livingstons fighting over her property."

"I like her—she sounds interesting. I remember I saw her when I was out there. She seemed to me hundreds of years old then."

"Of course the Great Western watches her all the time. If they can get her to sell to them or deed it to them, they stand a chance of invalidating our whole property, with all our years of improvements put upon it—or because of the mass of laws in California governing land, and the various constructions the court has put upon them, Santa Rosa might revert to the state and the Great Western would have a chance to buy one of the most valuable properties in all California."

"Couldn't we buy back our own property?"

"Yes, but nearly all your money is tied up in it. I doubt if we could raise the cash to beat the Great Western's offer."

"Hm—well, it *is* important. We've just got to get the Padrasso place, haven't we?" she said.

"That's what we think! The old woman adores Dennis—that's another reason for keeping him on."

"Maybe she'll leave it to him."

"I wish she would. That *would* simplify it."

"You *do* believe in him!" she laughed.

"Absolutely."

"I suppose this is the time to tell you that I want some more money for the theatre school."

He frowned slightly.

"Marcia, that theatre has cost about $50,000," he protested.

"It may cost that much more!" she warned him.

"I don't advise it, my dear! You spend money like the Shah of Persia."

"Only thing to do with it. I'll send Mary Jane Paul to talk to you about it. She knows what we need," Marcia replied airily.

It was quite dark when they finished, and Marcia felt somehow tired and depressed by it.

"It's all crooked, Judge. No woman who contributes as little as I do to the common good ought to be allowed to have all this money——"

"There you go again—that's out-and-out Socialism."

"Is it? I'm going to look up Socialism. I told you I didn't know what it was, but if that's it—I want to know about it."

"Let it alone. This country is sufficiently upset as it is," he warned her.

"Judge, what are you going to do to-night?"

"Let me see—I'm going to dine at the club, and play bridge——"

"Excuse me—but you are going on a lark

with your young and beautiful ward. You're going to take me to some jolly place for dinner, and to a 'show,' to make up for the hard work you've made my poor old brain stagger through for these two hours."

"Splendid! But what about Clarke?"

"Oh, bother Clarke! Let him dine at the club and play bridge."

"Gladly, my dear. Bless my soul, it's nearly seven. We'll reserve a table somewhere and go at once."

"Don't reserve a table. We'll take our chances. I want to go to some gay not too respectable place," she begged him.

"You'll have to choose it, Marcia. I don't know these wicked cafés the younger set infests."

"Come along, Methuselah. We'll try a new French place, in the Forties, which is said to be bang-up with the accent on the bang."

Le Café Chanticleer proved to be all of that. It was the last word in excellent food, rare wines, and decadent vaudeville. Everybody seemed wildly gay and Marcia caught some of the spirit of the place and the people, and amused the Judge mightily even as he marvelled at her youth, which could find a stimulus in this shrill, garish place.

Later they set forth, arm in arm, to look for a "show."

"We'll walk and shop for tickets. Let's find something funny and naughty to go with that café."

"It's easy enough to find the naughty on Broadway, but it isn't usually funny," he remarked.

"That remark is of the Old World, Judge. It's because you look for the School for Scandal or The Henrietta that you think Broadway dull. You must put up with bedroom farces like this!" she ended, stopping before a three-sheet. "The Proxy Husband—The Farce scream of the Season." The poster displayed a beautiful blonde heroine, in pajamas, seated in her bed, while two gentlemen exclaimed in chorus, "I am your husband."

"This is it, Judge. I feel sure that this is what we need," cried Marcia, leading her escort toward the box office.

"We'll try an act of it—we don't have to stay," he said warily.

They took their seats just as the curtain rose.

It was a farce of the usual Broadway brand. It was based on the idea of marriage by proxy between an Australian girl and a soldier at the front. When the time came for the groom to

return, he funked it and induced a pal to accept his responsibility. But an old lover of the girl heard these two make this arrangement and he decided to impersonate the long-distance husband. The complications are obvious enough, but the thing bounded along swiftly and laughs were many. The Judge and Marcia sat it through, and laughed with the rest.

"Is there such a thing as marriage by proxy?" she asked him, in the intermission.

"Oh, yes—it has been done. As a matter of fact, I believe it was made legal in several countries during the war."

"What a lovely idea!" laughed Marcia.

Later, when he stood upon her doorstep, refusing to come in, she kissed him good-night.

"I've had a perfect time, dear Judge."

"You've given me one, dear child," he answered gallantly.

But as he trudged off toward his own home he sighed to think how old he was, how the amusement of this generation appalled him. How young and enthusiastic Marcia was, for all her sophistication! What a pity that life should offer her, with all her gifts and all her money, merely the drab compromise of a marriage with Clarke Jessup!

CHAPTER X

AFTER the forced exit of the fifteen troublesome men from Santa Rosa, including the foreman, things settled down for a while on the ranch. Chuck took Caproni's place, and there was every indication of peace for a time.

Dennis found himself with the problem of Kate on his hands. She had refused to go along with Pinto the night of the fight. He had offered to send her to Los Angeles, or anywhere she wanted to go, but she refused to leave the ranch.

"Kate love Dennis Shawn—Kate stay Santa Rosa," was all she would say in answer to his suggestions.

She performed the most thorough housecleaning, painted and whitewashed the shack herself, in readiness for the time when Dennis Shawn should come to seek her. He watched these preparations with anxiety. Was he a fool, as Chuck had said? The girl was handsome, she loved him enough to risk her safety,

if not her life, in his behalf. He was no anchorite. Was it true that he owed it to Judge Tracey and the ranch to refuse her?

"Chuck, we've got to go up to Los Angeles to get some new men and a foreman," he said one day. "Got anything to do up there? Want to come?"

"You know it!" replied Chuck. "I need a manicure and a marcel—and some breeches," he added.

Dennis grinned at him.

"We can go to-morrow. We'll delegate one of the men to act in your place and Williams can run the rest of it. We'll bring the men back with us. I want to see them myself before we hire them. I don't want any of Roderiguez's friends."

"It won't take me ten minutes to pack, Dennis, so you set the hour."

They left the next day. Dennis was glad of an excuse to run away from Kate; Chuck was pleased with a change, so they were very cheerful. They had arranged to call Williams each night of the three days they were to be absent, so that he might summon them back in case of trouble.

Arrived in Los Angeles and registered at a hotel, Dennis said:

"I'll go see Swanson about my men right away, Chuck. It may take him forty-eight hours to collect what I want. What are you doing?"

"I'm having a Turkish bath, a shave, and a hair cut. I'm goin' to treat myself like a bloomin' Roman," he answered.

Dennis laughed.

"Terrible responsibility to be a professional beauty, eh, Chuck?"

He dodged out the door to escape the pillow the boy threw at him, and went chuckling down the hall.

They did not meet again until night, when they ordered for themselves an extremely good dinner, and sat on smoking until the dining room was almost empty.

"What do you say to a show, Dennis?"

"All right. Is there anything on?"

"Yes. I looked over the list. Vaudeville and movies and 'due to the energy and enterprise of Mr. Salasco,"The Proxy Husband," a farce by Mike Rock, is being enjoyed in Los Angeles at the same time it is being produced in New York.' I quote exactly. I think as a mark of our appreciation to Mr. Salasco, we ought to take that in, Dennis."

"It's all one to me," smiled Dennis.

Later they strolled over to the theatre and bought seats.

"Do you know," said Chuck, when they were waiting for the curtain, "I marvel at myself when I think how we live at the ranch. Last winter I saw about six shows a week, not to mention cabarets."

"Gosh, that must have been hard work!"

"I thought when the governor shipped me out here that I'd be running into Los Angeles every few nights."

"Stay in Santa Rosa long enough and it'll cure you," promised Dennis.

"I'm nearly cured now. I don't think anything about it. I'd like a girl to play with now and then but I don't miss the shows."

"I don't know about New York, and I've never been to a cabaret, but the shows they have out here are such damned nonsense."

The curtain rose on "The Proxy Husband," which was certainly no exception to Dennis's rule. But the thing was well-played, the idea a fresh one, and the audience laughed uproariously. Chuck's spontaneous boy laugh kept everyone within hearing distance amused, and Dennis enjoyed his companion quite as much as he did the play.

"Where did they get hold of that crazy idea, do you suppose?" Chuck asked as they went out.

"Can't imagine."

"You don't suppose there is such a thing, do you?"

"Marriage like that? No, of course not."

"Well, you do have to hand it to these fellows who turn out these shows. Must be some trick to think up an idea like that."

"But what's the good of thinking it up?"

"You old roughneck! You ought never to come off the farm! Didn't you get a laugh out of it?"

"I got a laugh out of you," smiled Dennis.

The next morning at breakfast Chuck was looking over the morning paper, while Dennis ate, and considered his plans for the day.

"Jupiter—here's news!" exclaimed Chuck.

"Yes?" Dennis read the item that Chuck indicated.

The marriage of Miss Marcia Livingston, the heiress to the great Livingston estate, to Mr. Clarke Jessup, of New York, will be celebrated on December 27th of this winter. It is estimated that the joint fortune of these two young people will approximate fifty millions.

Miss Livingston has long been noted for her interest in the theatre, her little playhouse being one of New York's choicest attractions. Her beauty and her wealth have

made her a conspicuous figure in New York society since her début some years ago.

Mr. Clarke Jessup is a club man and sportsman. He is sole heir of his father, Hamilton Jessup, the oil magnate. Mr. Jessup is a member of the Metropolitan Club, the Union Club, the University Club, Piping Rock, etc. etc.

"Why should that interest me?" asked Dennis lazily.

"It means you've got a new boss," said Chuck.

"You don't think he'd take the management of the estate away from Judge Tracey?" said Dennis, awake now.

"Why not? Have a look at him."

He passed the paper over to Dennis. There were pictures of the happy pair. Marcia driving a racing car—Clarke mounted on a polo pony.

"How does he strike you?" inquired Chuck.

"He looks like a half wit."

"You've said it. Even allowing for the newspaper portrait—he looks to me like a Moron!"

"The girl has never interfered—maybe he'll let us alone. He must have plenty of his own to look after."

"She's some girl, isn't she?" Chuck commented, turning the paper so he could look at Marcia.

"She looks like all the rest of them."

"All the rest of what, Denny?"

"Those women in New York. I saw them on Fifth Avenue and at the theatres and hotels. Nothing but clothes. Tired, painted faces, that looked as if they'd never felt anything or thought anything. Not for me!"

"What is your style of woman, Denny? Miss Livingston makes no hit—and Kate doesn't qualify——"

"Kate can love and she can hate. I'd take her of the two."

"Go ahead and take her, that's all you've got to do," teased the boy.

"Lord—I hope you're all wrong about this, Chuck. I think I'll write a letter to Judge Tracey about it. Queer he hasn't said anything to me about it."

"Tell him you don't approve of it and maybe she'll break it off," grinned Chuck.

Dennis composed and tore up several letters before he accomplished one. What he finally wrote to the Judge was as follows:

MY DEAR JUDGE:

I came up to Los Angeles yesterday on some ranch business, and I see by the morning papers here that Miss Livingston is going to be married. I feel pretty anxious

about what effect that may have on Santa Rosa. As you know, I've put in ten of the best years of my life there, and I'd rather run that ranch than own New York City, but if this Mr. Clarke Jessup is going to take over the running of Santa Rosa, my resignation will be in your hands at once. I don't know a thing about the man, and he may be all right, but from what the newspapers say about him, and the way he looks in the picture, I have a feeling that we wouldn't get along very well. You've given me so much freedom, and trusted me with so much responsibility, that I know I couldn't accommodate myself to anything less.

This may be a false alarm, Judge, on my part, but I want you to know just how I stand on it. I'd appreciate a letter from you about the matter.

With the most cordial regard to you, I am

Most truly,
DENNIS SHAWN.

Chuck did his best to persuade him that his fears might be groundless, but the Irish have ever their ups and their downs, and he went back to Santa Rosa deeply depressed by his vision of a future to be spent elsewhere.

The night of their return home was one of those rapturous California nights of stars and sweet odours and palpitating silences. Dennis walked alone in the garden for hours, thinking, planning a new life. He looked about him at the familiar mountains, at the ranch house,

the light streaming from its open doors and windows; he watched Wong's shadow slipping across the light from the kitchen. He heard the men singing down at the quarters. The haunting minor of their song struck upon his senses. He was like a man suddenly desolated of his all. With a groan he turned and walked down the hill to Kate's cabin, in search of comfort—in need of human tenderness. For the first time in ten years Santa Rosa was second in his thoughts.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS, of necessity, ten days before Judge Tracey's letter lifted the gloom that immersed Dennis Shawn. During that time Chuck's pranks scarcely raised a smile, and Williams's repeated philosophy of "what is, was to be" brought no least comfort.

The Judge wrote:

MY DEAR DENNIS:

Your letter in regard to Miss Livingston's marriage came to-day, and I hasten to assure you that I have already gone into the matter of the management of Santa Rosa with her, and I have her positive assurance that Mr. Jessup is not to interfere in any way, and that you and I will be let alone to run the ranch as we have done for these ten years.

I can quite understand your anxiety in the matter and I appreciate your frankness in regard to your situation. Miss Livingston is quite aware, I think, of your value to the estate, and as she is a very self-willed young woman, I think we can rely on her word that Mr. Jessup is not to assume command over her affairs. So, my dear Dennis, you may look forward to ten or even twenty years on your cherished estate.

Is there any more excitement out there? Your letters

with their spies and false heiresses do much to relieve the tedium of my days.

I am thinking a little of coming out to Santa Rosa this winter.

With cordial regards,
HORACE TRACEY.

"Well, boys, it's all right! According to the Judge, the Jessup fellow is not to butt in at all," Dennis announced joyously, looking up from the letter.

"Thank God—the reprieve has come!" cried Chuck. "Another week of gloom like the last, and you would have found my body in the ravine!"

"Lord—have I been as bad as that?" grinned Dennis.

He went off whistling to ride his rounds of inspection.

"Commend me to the Irish for equability!" sighed Chuck, and Williams smiled and nodded.

It seemed to Dennis, as he rode, that he was again a free man, after a fortnight in prison: only now did he realize how his whole life was bound up with Santa Rosa, how he loved every inch of its vast acres. He smiled grimly at the thought that his future and his happiness lay in the whim of a woman whom he had never seen. He thought of the power this woman

wielded over the lives of many people, with the fortune which she possessed, through no effort of her own. He conceived her selfish and indifferent to her responsibility.

His thoughts turned from this woman who played such an important part in his life to the other woman who had lately come into it. Untutored, with the simplicity of the savage, Kate was swayed by passions of love, of hate, of revenge. She gave her love to Dennis with abandon. Her one wish was to please him. Never by a sign or by a look did she suggest there was anything between them when they met by day or when he passed her house. But when the cabins of the quarters were wrapped in sleep, and he went to her, he found in her welcome the qualities of mother, mistress, and slave. To serve him, to delight him, that was the one desire of Kate's days.

It was against his better judgment that he had assumed this relationship with her, he was unsure where it would lead him, and now that his tenure of office at Santa Rosa was assured, he knew he must face some decision on the subject; but for the present his mind wandered off to other things, and the two women were forgotten.

It was some weeks after the Judge's reassuring letter that Chuck reported that the Señorita Padrasso was ill and in her bed. He had not been admitted, and when he asked the maid if the doctor had been called, she replied that the old lady refused to see him.

Dennis went over with offers of assistance, with flowers from his garden. He sent her an urgent message that she let him bring the doctor. The maid appeared anxious about her, but when Dennis suggested a trained nurse from Los Angeles she said she knew the Señorita would not have her about.

The old lady's voice summoned the woman, and Dennis followed her to the door. The old woman looked like a mummy, set up among her pillows. She stared at him with recognition.

"Dennis Shawn, I shall not die yet," she said.

"Not you. You're good for many a year yet, Señorita," he answered heartily.

But he left with an anxious face. He decided to report to Judge Tracey. He had always suspected that there was a pact between him and the señorita as to the disposal of her ranch. He wired:

Señorita Padrasso very ill. What arrangements have you about her ranch?

D. S.

The Judge answered immediately:

DENNIS SHAWN,
Santa Rosa.

No arrangement. Offer her any amount. Keep her condition secret, if possible.

H. T.

Dennis was reluctant to intrude upon the old woman, but he felt it to be his duty to his employers, so he induced the maid to take him to the señorita's bedside. She looked about the same, save that her eyes were filmed with oncoming death. She was conscious. She recognized Dennis, and seemed to hear him speak.

"Señorita, won't you let me bring you a doctor?" he begged.

"No."

"A trained nurse, then, to make you comfortable?"

"No."

"Will you forgive me if I ask you a business question?"

The old eyes stared at him and he fancied they held a glimmer of amusement.

"What do you intend to do with your ranch, in case of your death?"

She made no answer.

"I'm authorized to offer you any amount you name, if you will sell to the Livingston estate. Do you understand me?"

She nodded.

"Will you sell it to us, Señorita?"

She shook her head.

"You have some agreement with the Great Western?" he persisted.

Again she shook her head.

"But you have no heir, Señorita. Will you leave it to your maid?"

"No."

"I dislike to trouble you with it now, but you can see that my duty requires it."

She seemed to gather all her strength to speak.

"I will sell for $5,000, that sum to be given my maid, but I will sell only to a member of the Livingston family."

"But, Señorita, the only member of the family is in New York," he protested.

"Let her come here."

"But it will take five-six days," he began.

"I will live until she comes," the old woman said.

"But, Señorita, your strength may give out —it may be impossible for Miss Livingston to start at once——"

"I have spoken, Dennis Shawn. If she does not come, the ranch goes to the Great Western Railroad for the same sum."

She closed her eyes and refused to answer any question. She sat, like a sightless old Sybil, deaf to protest or entreaty. Dennis finally withdrew, utterly discouraged with his errand.

He wired Judge Tracey:

Señorita will sell for $5,000, that sum to be paid the maid, but she will sell only to Miss Livingston, in person. Great Western gets it for same sum if Miss Livingston does not come. Think she is dying. Is there any way I could be made Miss Livingston's representative or what can you suggest?

DENNIS SHAWN.

Chuck moved over to the Padrasso's to be on guard against Great Western representatives and also to help the distracted old woman who was the maid. Dennis was in and out of the house every hour or so.

"She isn't dead yet," Chuck said to him, when they were waiting for the Judge's answer. "I went in and sat with her for an hour. I thought she was asleep, but all at once I saw her

eyes on me, so I began to hum that old favourite of hers, 'The Spanish Cavalier,' and the old dear tried to nod her head in time. You know, Dennis, I'm awfully fond of the old thing," he added huskily.

"So am I, and I think it is damnable not to let her die in peace. I would almost let the Great Western get the ranch."

The Judge's telegram brought consternation. It said:

Would you be willing to go through marriage by proxy with Miss Livingston and represent her as her husband in deed of sale? Marriage can be performed by contract and telephone. It would be merely a legal form to be annulled at convenience of contracting parties later. Send me at once properly accredited power of attorney. Find out if Señorita will agree to this and wire. We are sending contract, special delivery. We will set hour of ceremony by telegram.

H. T.

Dennis and Chuck stared at each other.

"The Proxy Husband!" exclaimed the boy.

Dennis stared at the paper.

"The Judge must have looked into the legality of this," he muttered. "But, good Lord! I don't want to tie myself up——"

"What's the difference since she guarantees

you a divorce? She's engaged to somebody else, you know—she isn't anxious to be tied up, either."

Dennis nodded.

Williams came in then, and they showed him the telegram with its extraordinary proposition. For some reason it amused him. But the others were too excited to see anything humorous about it.

The old lady groaned and Chuck tiptoed to the door to look in at her.

"Look here, Dennis, old man, if you mean to go through with this, you'll have to hurry. She hasn't got many more days," he said.

"Do you suppose she can understand what I say to her?" he asked anxiously.

"I'll stir her up a bit—she pays attention to me," Chuck said.

They went into her room and Williams stood in the doorway. She lay with closed eyes and looked dead.

"This is cruelty to animals," protested Dennis.

Chuck went over to her and laid his hand gently on hers. "*Señorita mia*, do you sleep?" he asked her.

At first she showed no signs of life, but when

he had repeated it several times, she turned her eyes on him.

"Now—Dennis, fire away!"

"You're better, aren't you!" Dennis exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Has Marcia come?" She framed the words slowly, her eyes on Dennis.

"No, she cannot get here—there is not time. If Marcia marries me, Dennis Shawn, will you sell to me as her husband?"

She stared at him.

"Marry—how?" she asked, showing that her mind was clear.

"Judge Tracey says she will marry me by long-distance telephone, here at your bedside, if you consent."

"Legal marriage?"

"He evidently thinks so. He is a lawyer, you know. He must have looked up the legality."

They waited a long time. They scarcely breathed. Surely she was dead now. There seemed to be no rise and fall of her breast at all. Then she opened her eyes again, as if coming back from a great distance.

"I agree," she whispered.

Dennis tiptoed out and sent a boy in haste with a telegram:

Señorita agrees. So do I. Set earliest hour possible for ceremony. Will keep you posted on her condition.

D. S.

Because of their desire for secrecy, the telegrams were sent out by messenger from the town instead of being telephoned.

Harrowing days began for the three men who watched Señorita Padrasso and waited for the contract. It came, was signed, witnessed, and sent back. Again and again they thought she was gone. Dennis made out the deed of sale and wrote the check for $5,000, made out to the maid, Gita Cavallero. Everything was in readiness; as soon as the ceremony was completed it would not take five seconds, if only the woman had strength enough left to sign her name. The day that the contract should reach New York showed a change in the sick woman. When, occasionally, Dennis felt her pulse, it was very feeble. Once he wandered out to the kitchen where the old maid sat weeping.

"Did the señorita ever see Miss Livingston?" he asked her.

She thought for a little—and answered in Spanish.

"Yes—when she is a little girl—she come to

Santa Rosa. Señorita call her Little Fairy. She is beautiful, and she come every day to to see Señorita. She make love to Señorita."

Dennis nodded. It was some remote affection for the girl which moved the old woman then. But how strange that she had not made a will and deeded the ranch to her in the usual way. Why had she chosen this way, with its attendant melodrama, to pass on her property?

The telephone rang and he rushed back into her room. Chuck held the receiver, and the bell had apparently not aroused her. Dennis took the telegram:

Contract signed here. Have connection with Padrasso house for 5 P. M. Be ready for ceremony then. Thanks.
H. T.

"Another hour," groaned Chuck.

"Go call the county clerk and tell him to be here at 4:45," said Dennis to Williams.

It seemed aeons as they waited for those sixty minutes to pass. As the minute hand approached five on the big clock the strain became almost unbearable.

"As soon as the phone rings I'll begin trying to arouse her. I've got sherry here, if I can get her to drink it——"

Cling-g-g! went the bell and they all jumped with nervousness.

Dennis took the receiver.

"Padrasso Ranch? Mr. Dennis Shawn wanted. Speaking? Well—go ahead, New York is calling."

"Wake up Señorita—just for a little while," Chuck was urging her gently. "I want you to drink this, to the health of Dennis Shawn and his bride."

The old eyes fastened upon him. She heard his voice apparently. He repeated it—she nodded. Williams and the maid helped lift her up to drink the sherry.

"Quiet now—Dennis is about to be married."

"Dennis?" said Judge Tracey.

"Yes—Judge."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Have you witnesses there?"

"Yes, English, Williams, and the maid. Wait—here comes the County Clerk also to witness the deed of sale."

"Good. Marcia is here with me. Justice Allerton will perform the ceremony. We took out the license here. Here is the Justice——"

"Are you ready, Mr. Shawn?" a strange voice asked.

"Yes."

"Do you, Dennis Shawn, take Marcia Livingston to be your wedded wife?"

"I do," said Dennis.

"Do you, Marcia Livingston take Dennis Shawn to be your wedded husband?" he heard him ask her, and her reply:

"I do."

"Then I pronounce you man and wife," he said. "Just a moment," he added.

Then a clear voice came over the phone:

"This is awfully obliging of you, Mr. Dennis Shawn.

"Thank you. Good-bye."

He hung up the receiver and crossed to the señorita quickly. "Here is the deed of sale, Señorita, and here is the check. Are you strong enough to put your name to it here?"

He had to repeat it several times before she understood. Then she nodded. They lifted her up and by a prodigious force of will the ancient woman took the pen and wrote a large slanting signature to the deed. Then she sank back, the pen falling away from her withered hand.

She looked at Dennis with a smile in her eyes.

"Happiness——" she whispered.

Then she died.

CHAPTER XII

MARY JANE PAUL came into Judge Tracey's office, by appointment, to go over the needed funds for the school. She and the Judge were joint guardians of Marcia, as it were, and as such had often met before.

"I think I ought to begin by saying that I have done my best to persuade Marcia not to put any more money into this venture until it proves itself," she said.

"I may frankly say to you, Miss Paul, that I disapprove of it and told her so. Marcia's recklessness with money would wreck the Bank of England" the Judge protested.

"I know it," sighed Mary Jane.

"I find myself in a difficult position. Mr. Vernon, the other executor, is in Europe, and the responsibility of Marcia's affairs falls on me. In the last two years she has over-spent her income. To as great an extent as I dared I have put her money into Santa Rosa Ranch, which is a very lucrative investment—but

until we make sure of the Padrasso Ranch and our titles out there, I am holding up any further investment there."

She asked him about those titles, saying that Marcia had some garbled idea of it. He explained it carefully and fully.

"Judge Tracey, do you know what I wish sometimes? I wish Marcia would lose every cent she has, and have to make good herself," she said earnestly.

"I know—I know," he said. "You love her as I do, Miss Paul, and we both know that money has not brought her happiness."

"She is so restless and unsatisfied. And this ridiculous engagement"—she protested.

"You feel that, too. It seems such a pity for her to throw herself away on that fellow."

"Judge Tracey, I'd go to any length to break that off!" she exclaimed.

"I'm tempted to tell you the dream I've always had for Marcia," he began.

"Do," she urged him.

"She's like a daughter to me, you know. Her happiness is very dear to me. I've studied her for years—I know all her faults and her charms."

She nodded.

"There is only one man I've met I'd want her to marry. That is Dennis Shawn."

"The manager of Santa Rosa."

"Yes. He's a fine, big-hearted, clear-headed man. He is Marcia's mate, to my mind. But try as I will I cannot bring them together. She will not go West, he will not come East, and I can't interest either of them in the other."

Mary Jane laughed.

"Can't we manage it somehow? Two intelligent plotters like us?"

"I'd go to any length as you say. Marcia needs direction and discipline with tenderness—that is what Dennis could give her. He needs what she could give him. I wish you could see him," he added.

"I wish I could! He sounds right to me. If I can help in your plans, do let me," she said.

They went over her reports and Marcia's demands and agreed on a counter proposal which Mary Jane was to insist upon. When she left, Judge Tracey said:

"I may need you in my matrimonial plot, so be ready with support."

"Count on me, Judge," she smiled.

It was on the very heels of this conversation, just three days later, that things began to

happen at Santa Rosa. When Dennis's telegram came, telling the señorita's conditions of sale, and asking how he, Dennis, could be made Miss Livingston's representative, the Judge sat down to think the way out. One plan after another he discarded, and then, for some unknown reason, there came into his mind the ridiculous play he had seen with Marcia called "The Proxy Husband." His first impulse was to scoff at it—his second was to consider it. He knew that during the war proxy marriage had been legalized in several countries. In the back of his thoughts was the idea that if he could get these two married by proxy, he might manage to make it a permanent affair.

He made a study of marriage by proxy. He found it was possible and legal in states where common-law marriage existed; that such a marriage was legal and valid if it conformed to the law of the place of its celebration. That made it possible in California. Common-law marriage was not permissible in New York, but fortunately the laws recognized a marriage by contract. If a written contract of marriage were signed by each of the parties and by two witnesses, with the date and place of marriage,

and this contract filed within six months after its execution, in the office of the clerk in which the marriage was solemnized, such a marriage would be legal. It would be necessary for Dennis to give him power of attorney, in order for him to go with Marcia and obtain the license.

He found cases cited of American soldiers in Europe married by proxy to sweethearts in the United States. He found a ruling of the Judge Advocate General in March, 1919, that soldiers held abroad could marry by exchange of marriage contracts by mail, if such marriage did not controvert the state statutes.

He made out his case and summoned Mr. Stewart, the lawyer of the other executor, and laid it before him. He considered it carefully.

"Judge, I think the marriage would stand, but is it your intention to nullify it at the end of the six months, when the contract should be filed?"

Judge Tracey hesitated.

"Stewart, I don't intend it shall ever be nullified. I'm taking an awful chance in this—I may get myself into trouble, but those two people are very dear to me; they are made for each other; I think that if they can be brought together they will stay married."

"Upon my word, Judge, you are mixing up law and romance!"

"I know it. I'm trying to play God and I may be destroyed."

They went over it in detail—they faced the possibility of suit by the Great Western when the marriage was discovered, and against Stewart's better judgment Judge Tracey wired Dennis to send him, special delivery, power of attorney, properly witnessed and signed by a notary. He and Stewart drew up a marriage contract. It was dispatched to Dennis for signature and on its return the Judge was to induce Marcia to sign it.

"I don't envy you that job, Judge," laughed Stewart.

"If the old woman just holds out a few days more," sighed Judge Tracey. "If we make it, Stewart, I think I'll have them married by telephone, too."

"Not necessary."

"No, but it dramatizes it to them—makes it seem more personal."

"Judge, if you get away with this, it beats any big case you've ever won!" pronounced Stewart.

It looked as if the Judge would get away with it. First came the power of attorney from

Dennis to the Judge, with news that the old woman was sinking. Anxious days of waiting and then the contract came—then a telegram that the end was near.

The Judge had said as yet no word to Marcia. His plan was to rush her into this rash deed on the plea of immediate necessity. He telephoned Mary Jane Paul to meet him at Marcia's house at a certain hour.

"The time has come. I need you," was his cryptic message.

They arrived together at the Livingston house.

"I'm to be scolded for extravagance!" prophesied Marcia at sight of them.

"No—important and very urgent business this time, Marcia. You remember what I told you about the necessity of our acquiring the Padrasso Ranch?"

"Yes."

"The old woman is dying. She will sell for $5,000, paid to her servant, if she can put the deed of sale into your hand."

"But I can't get to California in a minute."

"Exactly. She has, therefore, agreed to sell to Dennis Shawn, if you will marry him by proxy, and authorize your husband to represent you."

Marcia stared.

"It's preposterous!" she exclaimed.

"It is merely a formality. The marriage can be annulled in six months, at the time when it should be registered."

"Then we are to swindle the old woman?"

"That's a harsh word! She has no possible heir—she can do as she likes with her estate, and she agrees to this. We are trying to save a huge investment in Santa Rosa by agreeing to an old woman's whim!"

He explained the process of such a marriage, read the law, pointed at the necessity of quick action, and waited Marcia's decision.

"Clarke would never agree to it," she said.

"Tell him afterward," said Mary Jane.

"Do you think it's square?" Marcia demanded of her.

"No. But as a sporting proposition I think it's immense."

"No more theatres, no more endowed schools to play with, Marcia, if Santa Rosa goes," remarked the Judge.

"Oh, but I have to finish the school! Oh, damn Santa Rosa—it makes so much trouble! You're sure this is just a 'sign-here' thing without any consequences?"

"Nobody on earth could guarantee that," said the Judge.

"What do I have to do?"

"Come with me to get a license, sign this contract, and be married by telephone in the office of a justice."

Marcia laughed.

"Judge Horace, it's too ridiculous! It's worse than that farce we saw!"

He looked at his watch and rose.

"I have a taxi here. I wired Dennis to be ready and I put in a call for Santa Rosa at five P. M."

"You did count on me, didn't you?" remarked Marcia.

"I thought you would be mad not to agree," he answered.

They went on their way quickly. Mary Jane could scarcely meet Judge Tracey's eyes without exchange of triumphant glances. They got the license, the contract was signed and witnessed—at exactly five o'clock the telephone call went through.

"You act as bridesmaid, Mary Jane," laughed Marcia.

The Justice stood by, while the Judge spoke to Dennis.

"Are you ready, Dennis? . . . Have you witnesses there?"

Then the Justice took the receiver. Marcia was shaking with laughter, but the other two were serious.

"Do you, Dennis Shawn, take Marcia Livingston to be your wedded wife?" asked the pompous justice.

Marcia stopped laughing and looked at the Judge.

"Look here," she said.

"Sh!"

"Do, you, Marcia Livingston, take Dennis Shawn to be your wedded husband?" he asked her.

She hesitated a second. The Judge and Mary Jane anxiously signalled her to speak.

"Y—yes," she said doubtfully.

"Then I pronounce you man and wife," said the impressive one.

She reached for the receiver.

"This is awfully obliging of you, Mr. Dennis Shawn!"

"The rude thing," she added, "he hung up."

She turned to speak to the Justice, and Mary Jane Paul spoke for the first time to the Judge:

"You delightful wicked old Machiavelli!"

"If it only works out!" he said, as if in prayer.

CHAPTER XIII

TEN days after the death of Señorita Padrasso Dennis received a long-distance telephone from Los Angeles from the Western manager of the Great Western saying that he would like to make an appointment the following day to see Shawn in regard to some important business. Shawn set an hour and offered to meet him at the train with a motor. Then he wired Judge Tracey for instructions.

"Well, boys, the fat is in the fire," he said that night, to his two assistants. "Mr. John Maxwell, of the Great Western, is to visit me to-morrow and try to find out what we have put over on them. I've asked the Judge to tell me what to say, but I wish we were out of this mess."

"*I* don't. I never knew life could be so exciting," exclaimed Chuck.

"Yes—well, you aren't married to an unknown lady with erratic tendencies," remarked Williams drily.

"No—worse luck."

"Of course, Judge Tracey knows what he's about, but the whole thing sounds awfully fishy to me. I don't see how I can make it sound anything else to this Maxwell. He's nobody's fool, you know."

"The worst they can do would be to prove the marriage illegal," said Williams.

"That would invalidate the deed—and then where are you? They say the titles to Santa Rosa can't be proved up till this other ranch is settled."

"The property would revert to the state and the bidding would begin again," Williams answered. "After all, suppose the Great Western does get it?"

"It would mean thousands and thousands of dollars to the Livingstons."

"Suppose it does. The woman is outrageously rich—let her lose it."

"The woman? Oh—I wasn't thinking about her," Dennis said. "I was only thinking of Santa Rosa and how the loss of that land would cripple it."

"Dennis always thinks of Santa Rosa first, last, and altogether! You'd think he owned it," said Chuck.

"Well, I've developed it for ten years. I've put every ounce of myself into it. It isn't surprising that I think of it like that, is it?"

"No, considering that you are what you are. I only hope you haven't let yourself in for anything painful by this fake marriage," commented Williams.

"That's just a legal form. The ceremony can be annulled in six months or so—and that's all there is to that end of it."

"Maybe," Williams said doubtfully.

"Don't you ever expect to see your wedded wife while she wears your name, Dennis?" demanded Chuck.

"Lord—no!" ejaculated the Irishman.

Judge Tracey's directions were:

Tell Maxwell deed of sale was signed by Señorita Padrasso witnessed by Williams, English, and County Clerk. Properly registered in County Clerk's office and deed in our possession here. No necessity to explain marriage. Say that you acted as representative of the Livingston estate. Marriage absolutely legal but need not be announced for six months which time may be valuable to us. Wire me result of interview.

Dennis sent Chuck to meet Maxwell's train. Affable efforts on the part of the gentleman to glean information from his voluble chauffeur

arrived nowhere. Chuck winked at Dennis as he handed their guest over to him.

After brief amenities the four men sat down and lit their cigars.

"Mr. Shawn, my time is brief, and I may as well come to the point of this visit. Are these gentlemen in your confidence?" inquired Mr. Maxwell.

"Absolutely."

"Very good. As you have probably guessed, my visit has to do with the late acquisition of the Padrasso Ranch by the owners of Santa Rosa."

"Yes," said Dennis.

"The Great Western Railroad and the Livingstons have been honourable contestants for the purchase of this property for over a hundred years——"

"More or less honourable," Dennis interrupted.

"You mean by that?"

"I mean that few people would call the method of the Great Western in the last dozen years to get possession of the Padrasso property *honourable.*"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Oh, yes, you do. You've had spies here,

ostensibly in our employ; you've backed up an effort to get rid of me; you've had secret agents, such as Roderiguez and bogus heiresses, such as his mistress—all to the end of acquiring that property."

Mr. Maxwell's urbane face never changed expression.

"I assure you, Mr. Shawn, that I never heard of any of these things. It is impossible that they should go on without my knowledge."

"Be that as it may—they have happened. These two men here will corroborate my statement any time it becomes necessary."

"Well, I hope that time may not come. If any unfortunate and unwarranted liberties have been taken by my underlings, it shall be investigated and punished. In the meantime, the past is past—is it not?"

"Sure. I'm not worrying about it. I just couldn't swallow that 'honourable'—that's all."

Mr. Maxwell smiled a most disturbing smile.

"They say, you know, that there is honour among thieves," he remarked. "Do you believe that, Mr. Shawn?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I haven't had much experience with—thieves."

"No?"

Dennis felt himself getting hot all over, but he merely glared at Maxwell.

"May I ask just how and by what means the Padrasso property came into the possession of the Livingstons?"

"By a deed of sale, signed by Señorita Padrasso, witnessed by Mr. Williams, Mr. English, the señorita's servant, and the clerk of this county."

"Oh. To whom was the property sold?"

"To Miss Livingston. I acted as her representative."

"In what capacity?"

"The capacity of superintendent and manager of the Santa Rosa Ranch."

"Exactly. Would it be too indiscreet to ask the price paid?"

"Yes, I cannot see what affair that is of the Great Western Railroad."

"This deed of sale was signed by the Señorita Padrasso, you say. Just when was it signed?"

"Shortly before she died."

"How shortly? Was she on her death bed when she signed it?"

"Yes. If you have any doubts about this being a legitimate sale, you can see the record of it in the County Clerk's office. The deed

itself is in the possession of Judge Horace Tracey in New York."

"Ah—yes—Judge Tracey—most able man. Was it at his suggestion that this death-bed sale was consummated?" smiled Mr. Maxwell.

"That I also consider no business of the Great Western."

"Indeed? There were no witnesses to this sale except Livingston employees?"

"The County Clerk and the señorita's servant."

"She tells me of the señorita's offer—that if Miss Livingston did not come, the ranch was to go to the Great Western Company at $5,000, to be paid to her."

"*She* tells you?"

"Ah, yes, I have seen the servant. She seems unsure of her mistress's sanity at the time of her death."

"She was as sane as you are!" exclaimed Dennis.

"That you will have to prove, Mr. Shawn. We have here the signed statement of the servant and of the County Clerk. The one rehearses your constant effort to get the old lady to agree to sell her property to your employer—

it tells of your continual presence in her house and at her bedside. It describes the pressure brought to bear upon her——"

"That's a lie!" quietly, from Dennis.

"Just a moment, Mr. Shawn. The clerk describes your marriage, by telephone, to Miss Marcia Livingston, in order that you might induce the old woman to sell to you as Miss Livingston's husband."

He paused.

"Have you any comment to make, Mr. Shawn?"

"None except that those two statements must have cost you a pretty price."

"You do not deny the contents of the statements?"

"I deny that Señorita Padrasso was anything but in her right mind. I deny that I brought any pressure to bear upon her."

"These denials you will no doubt repeat in the proper time and place, Mr. Shawn."

He put the two papers carefully away in his breast pocket.

"The Great Western will start suit at once against Miss Livingston, Judge Tracey, and yourself for having entered into a conspiracy to get possession of the Padrasso property

by illegal means, including a fake marriage, intended to mislead your elderly victim."

Dennis rose, making no comment at all, looked at his watch, and turned to Chuck.

"Mr. Maxwell can just catch the 4:10 train, if you hurry a little, Chuck. You'll be a trifle late to file your suit to-night, but there's all day to-morrow," he said genially to his guest.

Mr. Maxwell bowed silently, stepped into the car, and was whirled away by Chuck at a perilous speed.

"Whew!" said Williams. "Looks as if Chuck was planning to kill him on the way back."

"That won't save us. We're in for it this time. Why didn't I buy up that servant myself! I thought her five thousand would shut her up!" said Dennis seriously.

He put in a call for New York and at midnight he got Judge Tracey. He repeated the conversation with Maxwell and his threat of suit. Judge Tracey was evidently annoyed at this news.

"Dennis, can English and Williams manage the ranch for a bit?"

"I suppose so, why?"

"I think you had better start East to-morrow. We must get this thing straightened out and I

want expert advice on it. We won't keep you long but I want you here. Can you manage it?"

"Yes—if you think it is necessary."

"I do. You start to-morrow and let me know the minute you arrive. Shall I put you up at a club?"

"That would be kind, Judge."

"Call me when you get in then. Good-bye."

Dennis hung up the receiver with a sigh. His troubled face made Williams exclaim:

"More trouble, Dennis?"

"Yes. I've got to start for New York to-morrow."

"Trouble! He calls that trouble!" cried Chuck.

"I wish the Great Western had the damned old ranch!" said Dennis.

"You'll see Mrs. Shawn," Chuck remarked.

"Not if I can help it—and *don't call her that!*" said Dennis crossly.

He went off to his room, and later when Chuck knocked with an offer to lend him anything he needed, he found Dennis viciously throwing socks and collars and shirts into a bag.

"Look here, Dennis. This is a card with the address of my tailor. The minute you strike town you order some clothes—street clothes and evening clothes——"

"I'm not goin' down there to parade my clothes!"

"If you go to see Miss Livingston in those hand-me-downs you brought in Los Angeles, in ten minutes, while you waited for a train——"

"I tell you, I'm not going to see Miss Livingston!"

"You're going to handle a pretty ticklish situation, and with that kind of a woman you've got to have the right kind of clothes. Now don't be an ass. This card is in your collar box. You use it."

Dennis glared at him, but the card remained in the box.

The next morning the two men saw him off at the village station. He was furious at the complication he found himself in, and his irritation was all in his face, as the train pulled out.

"He doesn't look much like the conquering bridegroom!" said Chuck, as he and Williams turned back toward the ranch.

CHAPTER XIV

DENNIS SHAWN had five tedious days in which to mull over the crisis in which he found himself. He did not minimize its seriousness at all. As he went back over the steps that led up to it he could not see where he could have acted otherwise than he had done, considering his devotion to Santa Rosa Ranch and his ambition to have it saved and enriched by the added acres. At any rate, he could not reproach himself with any personal motives, for he had absolutely nothing to gain, except the thanks of Judge Tracey and possibly of Miss Livingston.

If only he and Judge Tracey could settle this thing without her complicating participation. He realized, now that he was calmer, that the chances were he would have to meet her—that she would have to be included in the councils.

He reconsidered also Chuck's suggestion about his clothes and to his own amusement he decided to accept it. If he was to share a difficult

situation with this lady, he determined that she should not have him at a disadvantage. Consequently, when he arrived in New York, before he so much as telephoned Judge Tracey, he took a cab to the address Chuck had put in his collar box, and demanded of the tailor proper clothes for all occasions for a fortnight in New York to be rushed through at special rates of both speed and cash.

Then he announced himself to the Judge and went to the Metropolitan Club, where the latter had promised to meet him. The Judge brought with him two lawyers: Stewart, the representative of the other executor of the estate who was in Europe, and a man named Troop. Dennis was most warmly greeted by his employer and they all adjourned to the Judge's room for a conference.

Judge Tracey asked Dennis to sketch for the two lawyers the state of affairs at Santa Rosa and the methods which the Great Western had employed. Shawn outlined the story—described his friendly relations with Señorita Padrasso, and when it came to the description of what had happened the day of her death, he read a report which he and his two assistants had written out the evening of the old woman's

death, repeating everything that had been said, describing everything that had been done. It was signed by English and Williams.

They catechized Dennis as to the details and he went over it until everything was clear. Then he took up the matter of Maxwell's visit and again read from a statement signed by the other two men as to what took place and the exact words of Maxwell's threat.

"Well, he's made good on it. I had notice this morning that suit was instigated against me, and Miss Livingston had the same, sent to my office. Yours will follow in good time, Dennis," said the Judge.

"Is the señorita's servant still at the ranch?" asked Mr. Troop, one of the lawyers.

"She was when I left."

"We'd better telegraph Williams to keep an eye on her and not let her disappear," said the Judge.

They agreed to that and Dennis wrote the telegram, which was sent at once.

"You made no effort to induce the County Clerk to keep the marriage a secret?" asked Stewart, the third man.

"No. I relied on the Judge's assurance that it was a legal form. I thought it better not to try to suppress anything."

"That was right, don't you think so, Judge?"

"Yes, we can establish a proper and bona-fide sale of the ranch, I think, if the legality of the marriage stands. You think we're pretty safe on that, Stewart?"

"Unfortunately, as I told you, Judge, there isn't much precedent to rely on," Stewart answered dubiously.

"I think one thing is obvious," said Troop, "and that is, that this marriage must be lived up to, to all intent and purposes, until after the case comes to trial."

"What did you mean by that?" demanded Dennis quickly.

"I mean that you and Miss Livingston must at least simulate a marriage. You should, I think, live under the same roof."

"But I could not agree to that at all!" said Dennis firmly.

"Then, I think we should face the fact that we are in a most unfortunate situation in which the honour of Judge Tracey and Miss Livingston is endangered."

"What about my honour?" inquired Dennis.

"And yours, too, Mr. Shawn. I do not undervalue your predicament at all. I only mention Judge Tracey and Miss Livingston first, because

they are so much in the public eye, and have so much more to lose. This suit may be most disastrous to Judge Tracey. Any accusation of fraud or attempted fraud to a man in his position——"

"But," said Dennis, deeply troubled, "even if I agreed to this arrangement, certainly Miss Livingston would not."

"What about that, Judge?"

"I'm afraid Dennis is right."

"But if she thought it would save you from embarrassment—possibly disgrace——"

"I should not wish her to act against her desires to protect me in this matter," protested the Judge.

"I wouldn't worry, Judge. That young woman has never done anything yet against her desires," said Mr. Stewart.

"It is a little awkward for her. She is engaged to some fellow, isn't she?" inquired Troop.

"Yes—Jessup. Clarke Jessup," replied the Judge. "We could not find him at the time of the ceremony, but Miss Livingston prophesied that he would not approve her action."

"Could we induce Miss Livingston to meet us and discuss the matter?" Stewart asked.

"I doubt it. I think you had better let me see her——"

"I disagree there. You won't use the only argument that might have weight with her—your position in this affair——"

"But if Dennis, here, refuses, why do we waste time on Miss Livingston? We'd better just make our plans to——"

Dennis turned a serious, troubled face to the Judge.

"Judge Tracey, I had not thought of what this might mean to you. I withdraw my refusal. If Miss Livingston will agree to any arrangement you may make, I will agree also."

Judge Tracey held out his hand, real feeling in his face.

"Thank you, my boy. I appreciate that—but I want to get it out of all your minds that I am the person to be considered here. I'll take my chances with the rest. I have not connived at a fraud. I consider that I have acted throughout in good faith. Now, as to Miss Livingston, I'll promise nothing but I'll do my best. *She* will be at home late to-morrow afternoon, I learned from her butler, and I will see her then. Shall we arrange to meet at my office at eleven—the following morning?"

It was so settled, and Troop and Stewart left.

With an intuitive sense of failure Judge Tracey waited the next afternoon for Marcia to appear. He noted that the tea things were in readiness and hoped against hope that there were to be no guests.

"Judge—how nice of you!" she cried as she crossed the room to him, very lovely in her soft tea gown.

He took her hands and looked at her seriously.

"I've come on a most difficult errand, Marcia."

She frowned.

"Not that ranch?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't hear about it—not a word. I'm sick of it."

"I'm afraid you must hear about it, Marcia. It is exceedingly serious."

He went on to explain the suit of the Great Western and reminded her of its possible consequences to them all.

"Now, look here, Judge, you told me that marriage business was a legal formality, like signing a deed. That's the only reason I agreed to it. Clarke is perfectly furious about it. You got me into that, Judge, and you've got to get me out."

"That's what I want to do, but I must have your help."

"Well"—with a sigh—"go ahead."

"Dennis Shawn arrived in New York yesterday, and Mr. Stewart, Mr. Vernon's lawyer, and Mr. Troop, whom you know, and myself listened to Shawn's description of the whole affair. I have no idea that we can be convicted of fraud, because we acted with no such intention, but it was the opinion of these two very astute lawyers that, since the whole situation rests on the legality of the proxy marriage, care must be used to establish the fact of marriage——"

"Don't be legal—I never understand it," she interrupted.

"They think it would be wiser, if not absolutely necessary, for you and Dennis Shawn at least to simulate marriage until after the case comes to trial."

Her look of utter astonishment halted him.

"What nonsense are you saying, Judge Tracey?"

"No nonsense—very serious sense."

"You mean I'm to—to——"

"The suggestion was merely that you take up residence under the same roof."

"But I've never seen the creature!"

"Under the law a proxy marriage need not be announced for six months subsequent to the ceremony—but on account of this suit, it seems necessary to act at once."

"Do you mean to say that this Sham, or whatever his name is, can come on here and claim to be married *to me?*"

"On the contrary, he is as reluctant to carry out this idea as you are!"

"Is he? Indeed! Well, do assure him that he will not have me forced upon him, as even a 'simulated' bride! I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life! Why, I wouldn't agree to this, if it meant that I'd lose every cent I've got in the world!"

"It looks very much as if that might be the price you'd pay, Marcia!"

But she was very angry now, and Judge Tracey knew his case was lost. He rose.

"All right, Marcia, we will defend the suit as best we can. You and I may be pretty badly discredited, and your loss of Santa Rosa is very serious, but I guess we can bear that."

"I don't care what happens—you advised me to do this fool thing and you can find some way out!"

"I suppose you wouldn't see Mr. Shawn?"

"I wouldn't see that man for anything on earth. I loathe him!"—hotly.

"Well, my dear, I'm sorry to have upset you so," said poor Judge Tracey, taking his leave.

He went to the club in search of Dennis, but he was not there. He had left word, however, that he would return about five-thirty—so the Judge paced up and down the corridors impatiently. Presently Dennis came in. Even the Judge, perturbed as he was, noted that he was wearing new clothes and hat and that he even carried gloves.

"Hello, Judge. Don't I look like a tailor's model? I've got me some New York clothes."

Then he saw the Judge's worried face.

"What's the matter? Did you see Miss Livingston?"

"Yes. She was very angry. She won't hear of any such arrangement."

"You told her the consequences?"

"I told her, but I doubt that she listened."

"I'd better see her."

"No, Dennis, she absolutely refuses to see you. She seems to blame you in the matter—unreasonable as that is——"

"Rubbish—what's her address?"

"I don't advise this, Dennis," he added weakly.

"Better wait for me here. I'll be back in half an hour or so."

"Well," sighed Judge Tracey, "God be with you!" But the twinkle in his eye, and the smile of satisfaction aimed at Dennis's back, belied those earnest words.

CHAPTER XV

MARCIA LIVINGSTON had rarely been so angry in her life as she was when Judge Tracey left her. It was her basic principle to dominate every situation, and suddenly to find herself involved in a crisis in which she had acted under orders was disconcerting and infuriating. But she had no intention of submitting to any such indignity. Life had never disciplined Marcia —she had always bought immunity with her money.

Mary Jane Paul came in, during the brainstorm, and received a perfect avalanche of angry explanations from Marcia about the outrageous proposal the Judge had dared to make to her.

"You say they think you ought to live under the same roof with this man until the case is tried?" Mary Jane repeated.

"They do! They actually do! Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

Mary Jane lifted up her head and laughed.

"I'm glad somebody can see something funny in it! Its humour escapes me!"

"I should think it was an adventure after your own heart, Marcia."

"Well, you're mistaken."

"Have you met Mr. Shawn?"

"No—and I don't intend to."

"I don't see how you can avoid that. After all, it's his problem, too."

"I'm not interested in his problem and I will not be bothered with him. I told the Judge that. I'm sick of the whole silly business. Clarke is making the most awful row about it——"

"Oh, bother Clarke!"

"You're always reminding me that I'm engaged to him and that he has his rights."

"If you're married to Shawn, Marcia, I really think you ought to disengage Clarke," said Mary Jane, smiling.

"But I'm not. I'm not, I tell you!"—angrily. "You heard them say it was a mere formality."

"Yes, but nobody foresaw this law-suit."

"They can all go to the devil! I don't intend to bother myself any more about it. And I will not see this Shawn man!"

Clarke Jessup followed the butler into the room.

"How-do, Marcia? How-do, Miss Paul?" he drawled in his lackadaisical way.

"Hello, Clarke," was Marcia's greeting.

"Tea for a tired business man?" he inquired, sinking into a chair with a sigh.

Mary Jane's hostile eyes inventoried him from his sleek hair to his dapper boots. How she hated his propriety—his meticulous perfection!

"What's the good news?" he inquired.

"None that I know. I'm cross as a bear! You'd better be amusing, Clarke."

"To be amusing, I fear, is not in my line. Miss Paul, as one of my harshest critics, would you call me amusing?" he inquired, his heavy-lidded eyes turned upon her.

"Depends on what you call amusing, I suppose. I get a good deal of amusement out of you," she retorted.

"Ah, now, you see, Marcia, Miss Paul and I are getting on! We're beginning to amuse each other."

Marcia was obviously not listening. She absently poured the tea, a frown on her brow, and her mouth mutinous.

The butler appeared at the door, ushering in a guest.

"Mr. Dennis Shawn," he announced.

"I'm not at home," replied Miss Livingston sharply.

Dennis advanced into the room rapidly. His swift glance took in the three people; he walked to the tea table and faced Marcia, who stared at him for a second in total astonishment.

"Miss Livingston, I'm Dennis Shawn," he began.

"I do not know any one of that name," she replied insolently.

He paid no attention to that.

"It is important that I should have five minutes of conversation with you—in private."

"I know of no reason why you should intrude in my house when I'm entertaining guests,"—hotly.

Clarke walked to Marcia's side.

"Would you like to have me handle this?" he asked her.

The two men looked at each other.

"No—I'll handle it myself," said Marcia.

"I dislike being here as much as you dislike having me—but I have something to tell you that you do not know," said Dennis.

"I doubt it. The only thing I want of you is to leave my house."

Mary Jane rose.

"Marcia, I beg of you, let Mr. Shawn have his five minutes. Mr. Jessup and I will wait in the library."

"On the contrary, if this fellow has anything to say to Marcia, I intend to hear it," remarked Mr. Jessup.

A faint smile appeared on Dennis Shawn's face—it was so fleeting that Marcia suspected it was derisive.

"Wait in some other room until I call you, please," she ordered her two guests.

"Marcia—I protest that——" began Jessup.

"You go or I will," she interrupted briefly.

With a shrug of his shoulders Mr. Jessup turned to Mary Jane Paul.

Marcia rose and face Dennis, who still stood near her. He towered above her, which made her feel at a disadvantage, so she moved away.

"What do you want?" she said brutally.

"Judge Tracey told you what he and those two lawyers advised?"

"Yes."

"You refused to consider it?"

"Certainly."

"Have you considered the consequences?"

"I don't care anything about the consequences!"

"But you must," he said firmly.

A sound issued from Marcia's lips which might have been laughter or rage.

"Why didn't you think about the consequences before you agreed to the crazy idea?" she taunted him.

"I did."

"Then why did you incriminate yourself?"

"For reasons which you would not understand."

"I'm normally intelligent."

"It was your heart, not your head, I distrusted."

"What has my heart to do with it?"

"My reasons for acting in your interests were entirely due to my admiration and affection for Judge Tracey."

"You consider that you *were* acting in my interests?"

"I was trying to save for you a valuable property which will in no way benefit me."

"I can't see why you were so altrustic, Mr. Shawn."

"I told you that you would not see."

"I'd rather lose the old Padrasso Ranch and Santa Rosa, too, than be bothered about it like this."

"I did not come here to listen to childishness of that sort. I'm not in the least concerned about you or the consequences of this ceremony we went through——"

"No?"

"The situation is abhorrent to me, but I'm not considering myself, either."

"Generous!"

"My concern is for Judge Tracey. He evidently acted with only your interests in view, and apparently he has, thereby, put himself in a very compromising position. This suit will be aired in every dirty sheet in the country, and whether they win or not, Judge Tracey will be open to very serious criticism."

"But why didn't he think of all this?" she interrupted him.

"I do not know. My opinion is that he let his devotion to you and your interests outweigh everything else."

She moved about impatiently.

"Well?" she flung at him.

"I think it is up to you and me to protect him from these consequences as much as we can.

"But it's outrageous! I can't do it. I'm engaged to Mr. Jessup, in the other room there. He wouldn't permit it for a minute."

Dennis allowed himself one broad grin at this, which undid all he had done so far.

"I think the thing has gone too far now for Mr. Jessup's interference," he remarked. "You can't hide behind Mr. Jessup."

"I won't agree to it—that's settled!"

"My suspicion about your heart seems to be correct."

"Good afternoon," she said.

"How many years is it that Judge Tracey has devoted himself to you and your business?"

No answer.

"He speaks of you as if you were his daughter—the very apple of his eye. But I suppose to the kind of woman you are that is of no consequence. It is preposterous to expect that you should inconvenience yourself for two or possibly three months in return for a lifetime of devotion——"

"But you don't know that it will be two or three months. Cases have dragged on for years!" she objected.

"It is to the interest of the Great Western to hurry this to trial."

"Is it your idea that you should come here to stay?"—insolently.

"God forbid! You might come to Santa Rosa—you would be comfortable there—and —and independent."

"I won't go there—I hate it!"

"We might go to a hotel——"

"Here in New York?"

"Anywhere you say, of course, I ought to be at Santa Rosa——"

"Isn't there any other way?"—desperately.

"If you can find one, for heaven's sake, do!"

She walked up and down—up and down—her face one ardent protest.

"If we gave the Padrasso place to the Great Western, would they withdraw the suit?"

"It is worth nearly a million dollars and its possession might invalidate the whole of Santa Rosa."

"I don't care if it's worth everything I've got!"

He shot a look of admiration at her.

"I'll propose that to the lawyers, but I doubt that they would agree to it."

"I tell you, I don't care about the money."

"Very good. If I can induce them to sell the Padrasso Ranch to the Great Western,

on agreement that they withdraw their suit, you agree to the loss entailed?"

"Yes."

"If not—the Judge must take the consequences with the rest of us?"

She took a few seconds again.

"If I had a house party of people at my place on Long Island and you came to stay, would you do all you could to get me out of this mess?"

"I think you could rely on me for that!"

His tone made her look at him.

"I suppose you want it over as much as I do."

"More, if anything."

She flushed hotly.

"When could you get your house party together?" he added.

"In a day or two, I suppose."

"This is Wednesday—I'll plan to come on Saturday."

"Do we—do I—must the others know about us?"

"That's your affair. I should say it was not necessary to explain."

"When will you see the lawyers about getting the suit withdrawn?"

"To-morrow at eleven. Why don't you come to Judge Tracey's office yourself and propose it?"

"Oh I don't want to!" she exclaimed.

He looked his impatience, nodded, and turned toward the door.

"At eleven, you said?" she repeated.

"Eleven. Good afternoon."

She inclined her head, her irritation with him expressed in every line of her face and figure. He smiled at her, and went out.

CHAPTER XVI

ALAS for poor Marcia! She presented herself at the meeting of the lawyers, as Dennis had suggested, and urged them to buy off the Great Western with the Padrasso Ranch, but they refused absolutely. She raged and threatened and ordered them to obey her—but they were four very resolute men. Mr. Stewart took her aside and called attention to her opportunity to stand by Judge Tracey in this crisis, and so it was that an angry Marcia went home and summoned Clarke, Mary Jane Paul, and some people named the Lathrop Jenningses to come and stay with her at her Long Island house.

They accepted, although Mary Jane had to come to town every day.

"I wouldn't miss it if I had to walk in," she said, in accepting.

"Why?" casually from Marcia over the telephone.

"Because I want that wonderful man to marry me, after he is through being married to you," was the unexpected reply.

"Mary Jane! Are you going to be a bore about him, too?"

"I are."

Marcia sent a curt note to Dennis announcing that she expected him at such-and-such a train, giving the station and full directions, on Saturday, "according to agreement" she added.

She found Clarke not as amenable as usual. It became necessary to tell him the truth. She finally convinced him that it was his duty to be a member of the party in order to help her out.

It was a strangely assorted house party which assembled in Marcia's drawing room for cocktails before dinner on this Saturday night. She had asked the Jenningses because she thought they would disturb Dennis Shawn. Mrs. Jennings was an exotic person of utmost sophistication, who was now living with her third husband. It seemed probable that she would soon move on to number four since Lathrop Jennings was both stupid and stingy.

Mrs. Jennings was clothed in the fewest possible layers of tulle—the skirt of her gown hung French fashion, just below the knee. The thinnest of silk stockings called attention to her very good legs. Mary Jane was in her

black dinner gown which never varied. Marcia herself was very lovely—very normal in contrast to Mrs. Jennings, very feminine in contrast to Mary Jane Paul.

The men were equally differentiated. Clarke was sleek and perfect. Jennings was big, red, and "beefy," with a neck which bloused over his collar in the back. Dennis hated dress clothes and was rather awkward in them. But while the rest of them all sensed a strain and tried rather shrilly to overcome it, it irritated Marcia to see how at ease this stranger was, how little evidence he gave of the preposterous position he occupied in this house.

She sat him next to Mary Jane at dinner, and was furious at herself for doing so when she saw how well they hit it off, and realized how bored she was with Lathrop Jennings.

From that first night she found herself always irritated with Dennis Shawn. He was too big, too good-looking, too much at ease, too take-it-for-granted that he was there. He neither sought her out nor avoided her. He was merely a courteous acquaintance.

Sunday developed a situation which she had not planned. It became evident that Mrs. Jennings had eyes for no one but Dennis. She

set her trap for him most cleverly. He was evidently unaware of it. He looked at her and listened to her with the puzzled air of a large Newfoundland dog watching a trick fox terrier. Mary Jane was consumed with amusement, and Marcia was annoyed.

"Mrs. Jennings is priceless, Marcia," said Mary Jane. "Where did she come from?"

"A harem, I think! Isn't she disgusting. I don't think I can stand her."

"I suppose you asked her to shock Mr. Shawn."

Marcia shot a glance at her best friend.

"She seems to be quite his style," she answered.

Mary Jane laughed.

"Well, I'm going to rescue him for a while. We're going for a tramp."

She went off whistling happily as Clarke came in.

"For heaven's sake, Marcia, why the Jennings woman? Isn't the mighty hunter from the hills enough, without Salome thrown in?"

"Doesn't she amuse you? I thought she would. I had her for you."

"Much obliged. I'm a little old for that sort of thing."

"Hence your passion for an *ingénue*, like me."

"How long are you going to keep this madhouse open?" he inquired.

"Until the Great Western case is called. I told you that."

"I hope I can stick it out, old girl, but for heaven's sake get some new people."

"Don't stay if it bores you!"

"I expected to be bored—but this has been a terrible day," he complained.

"It's been wonderful for me!" she exclaimed sarcastically.

"Yes, but after all, you brought it on yourself."

"We'll not go into that again, *please.*"

By planning something to do every minute Marcia kept things going during that endless week. Mary Jane was gone all day, so a duel began between Marcia and Mrs. Jennings over Dennis Shawn. Mrs. Jennings appropriated him completely for three days, until Marcia, goaded to desperation by her boredom with Clarke and Jennings, gave her battle. She carried him off, under the nose of the enemy, one afternoon, in her little car, on an ostensible errand to the village. He accepted without any show of interest.

"I suppose you're awfully bored, Mr. Shawn, aren't you?" she taunted him.

"I don't consider my feelings one way or the other. I am doing something for Judge Tracey, and that's all there is to it."

"You're doing something for me, too," she reminded him boldly.

"Incidentally."

"You wouldn't bother about me if it weren't for the Judge?"

"Why should I?"

"I'm your employer. I'm your boss!" she said hotly.

He laughed at that. She drove about sixty miles an hour for a few minutes.

"Mrs. Jennings seems to amuse you, Mr. Shawn."

"Yes, she does."

"She wouldn't expect a simple ranchman to have such sophisticated taste."

"She isn't to my taste"—simply.

"No? You seem to spend most of your time with her."

"I can't escape her," he said.

She laughed at that. He baffled her, this big cool person, and finally in a fit of pique she took him home.

As the days went on, her temper grew uncertain, Mrs. Jennings was behaving very badly. Like the little girl in the poem,

"She mocked 'em, an' she shocked 'em.
And she said she didn't care!"

The men all laughed at her, which only encouraged her.

Then Dennis annoyed his hostess by talking to the servants as if they were equals. He took more trouble with Bates, the butler, and Simcox, the chauffeur, than he did with her.

"I wish you wouldn't call the butler 'Mr. Bates,'" she said to him bluntly.

"Why not? He calls me Mr. Shawn."

"Naturally. He's not your equal."

"Isn't he? He's a better butler than I'd be. He's a pretty well-posted man, I find in talking to him."

"But you ought not to talk to him!"

"Why not? He and Mr. Simcox interest me more than Jennings or Jessup do."

"Haven't you any conception of how to treat servants?"

"Yes. My conception is that it's ridiculous for two husky fellows like Bates and Simcox

to spend their time waiting on such folks as there are in this house now."

"Oh!" she said, and it expressed all she felt.

The climax came at dinner on Saturday, the end of the week. Judge Tracey had come out for the week-end. Mrs. Jennings took the floor and kept it against all comers.

"Oh, Dennis Shawn, why won't you open your handsome mouth and tell us about the Far West!" she cried to him.

"What do you want to know about it?" he asked.

"Are you very savage out there?"

"Very."

"Do you barter for wives or just club them on the head?"

"Both."

"How did you get yours, Dennis Shawn?"

"By proxy," he replied simply.

An electric shock went round the table. Marcia slowly turned a blazing gaze on Dennis.

"The Proxy Husband!" cried Mrs. Jennings. "Are you serious?"

"Oh, very."

"Do tell us about it! Why did you do it?"

"For fun!"—satirically.

"Where did the woman live? Was she rich?

Was she pretty? Had you ever seen her? Oh—do go on!"

"She lived all over the world. She was rich. I suppose you'd call her pretty."

Marcia's glass of water went on to the floor with a crash.

"How stupid of me! Pray go on—don't let me interrupt your romance, Mr. Shawn."

"Where is she now?" from Mrs. Jennings.

"I don't know."

"Haven't you ever lived with her?"

"No."

"Nor seen her?"

"I think it's fair to say I've never really seen her."

"Then you can't possibly marry me?"—languishingly.

"No—sorry."

"Most interesting!" commented Judge Tracey.

Marcia rose.

"You should go in for melodrama, Mr. Shawn."

"I do."

As they all trailed out Clarke fell in step with Dennis.

"Damned bad taste, I should say!"

"I'm glad to know you've got some ideas on something," replied Dennis coolly, turning away.

"Dennis, what ailed you?" inquired the Judge anxiously.

"She needs the bit, Judge. I've stood for a good deal this week, and to-night I punished her. She'd be all right if she had somebody to give her the lash now and then."

"Do you think so? Well, nobody ever has."

"It isn't too late."

"May I speak to you, Mr. Shawn?" came an icy voice at his elbow.

He smiled, bowed, followed Marcia into a distant room.

"How dared you tell that story?" she burst out at him.

"Why shouldn't I? It amused her."

"Did you think it would amuse *me?*"

"I wasn't trying to amuse you."

"It was insulting—that's what it was! I don't intend to be insulted in my own house, not even for Judge Tracey."

"When shall I go?"

"I suppose you would enjoy putting me in a position where I'd be forced to marry you!"

"On the contrary, nothing would be so distressing to me as to have to marry you. You are the last woman in the world I'd wish to marry, spoiled, idle, useless, untrained, heartless

—oh, no—what use would you be to a man as a wife?"

For one moment he thought she was going to strike him; then, with a muffled sound of fury, she turned and ran out of the room. He stayed on, thinking over the days ahead. What a fool he was to have got himself into this scrape! Bates came in, looking very miserable.

"Mr. Shawn," he began "excuse me, sir—but Simcox and I have got ugly orders, sir."

"Yes?"

"We're to take you to town, sir, in the car, and put you on the Limited for Los Angeles. If you refuse, we're to use force, sir. Oh, Mr. Shawn, what are we to do?"

"Miss Livingston has ordered you to carry me off?"

"Yes, sir!"

"In these clothes?"

"Simcox is packing you a bag now, sir."

Dennis roared with laughter.

"Ask Judge Tracey to come in here, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, if you knew how we hate to have you go, sir!"

"Much obliged, Mr. Bates. Don't you worry."

The butler hurried away and Dennis sat down

and grinned and waited. Judge Tracey came at once.

"Mr. Bates, will you get Miss Livingston's maid to pack her bag for five days' travel?"

"Yes, sir."

When he had left them Dennis turned a beaming face on Judge Tracey.

"Judge, I'm being kidnapped."

"What?"

"Miss Livingston is mad, Judge, through and through. She has ordered the butler and the chauffeur to take me to town and put me on the Limited, by force, if necessary."

"But it is perfectly ridiculous"—began the Judge.

"Don't waste breath. I'm going to take her with me."

The Judge stared at him, speechless.

"She's agreed to see this through and she's going to see it through. She ought to be at Santa Rosa, anyhow——"

"But, Dennis, my boy, it can't be done. She'd make it so unbearable for you."

"I don't mind, I like it. I'm not sure I'm not in love with the creature."

"Dennis!" cried Judge Tracey. "Do you think she cares for you?"

"She's mainly busy hating me, but to-night when I found how angry I made her I decided she cared."

"But how can you get her to go?"

"You'll have to do that. I'll start with the big car. Then you will get a telegram from me calling you to Chicago on the 10:50 train. You make a row—about no car—get her to drive you in, in her racer. If we can get her on the train, I can manage her," he said thoughtfully.

"But I may not be able to persuade her."

"I won't leave unless you arrive. I'll go to the club for the night and call you in the morning. You'll have to work out the details of your part. You'd better pretend that you have transportation, etc., all ready and had expected to go Monday. I will get a stateroom on the Limited and I'll sit in it until two minutes before the train leaves. Simcox will keep out of sight, but will watch for you at the train gate. You persuade her to see you aboard. You can think of some reason for her doing so. Simcox, when he sees you, will send a porter to you with a telegram containing the car number and stateroom. When you get on the train, get rid of the car porter, open the door, as if

to usher her in, then shut the door quickly and disappear."

"But, Dennis, this is more incriminating than the marriage!"

"Dear Judge, she will live to thank you! This is the beginning of her regeneration. There's real stuff in that girl! Trust me with her, Judge," he added gently. "Here are my captors. Boys, I'm in your hands. I'll tell you my plans on the way to town. See you later, Judge."

It was exactly two minutes before the California Limited was to leave that the door to "stateroom A" opened to admit a lady in motor clothes. The door closed instantly behind her and was locked. Then the lady looked into the cool gaze of her husband by proxy, and the train moved out of the station.

CHAPTER XVII

MARCIA did not scream nor try the door, nor attack Dennis. She just stood quietly and looked at him.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

She shook her head.

"You can't possibly stand all the way to Los Angeles."

"But I'm not going to Los Angeles."

"I beg your pardon, but you are. By your orders I am going to California, and as we agreed that you were to be with me for a few months, it naturally follows that you also are going to California."

She smiled.

"I can ring for the conductor, stop the train, and get off."

"You could no doubt, but I shall not let you ring."

"I can scream and have him here in three minutes."

"Yes. It would make spicy reading for—Jessup, we'll say, and the rest of your world,

that you were taken screaming from a Pullman stateroom, occupied by a man to whom you were secretly married."

She sat down.

"What is it that you propose to do?"

"Take you to the ranch for the time we are forced to spend together."

"Did Judge Tracey lend himself to this unspeakable insolence?"

"He did. I explained to him that some whim had made you break your word of agreement to us, that you had with unspeakable insolence ordered your servants to put me on a train for the West. I pointed out to him that there was nothing to do but take you with me."

"I should expect *you* to be a brute—I scarcely thought Judge Tracey would be!"

"Possibly he is tired of your lack of consideration for him, and of your unreliability. I should think he would be."

"I'm not interested in your thoughts."

They were sitting uncomfortably, she on the edge of the lower berth, he on the long seat opposite. Presently she said:

"Was it all a lie about Judge Tracey's trip to Chicago?"

"Yes. That was my idea of the best way to get you aboard this train."

"Why didn't you kidnap me outright?"

"Too crude. Difficult, too, in New York, at that time of night."

"Have this berth put up. I'm not comfortable," she ordered.

"You had better go to bed—it is a long, tiresome journey. I have the section just outside your door, and I shall sit up, myself, and act as guard," he added reassuringly.

"Stay or go; it is all one to me," replied the girl.

"Most gracious! I prefer to go. Here is your bag," he said, producing it.

"Wonderful! you thought of everything"—sarcastically.

He bowed, as if acknowledging a compliment.

"Pleasant dreams! I wish you good-night," he remarked. "By the way, the porter's bell is disconnected. If you want anything, just speak to me."

He unlocked the door and left her.

Marcia sat perfectly still for several minutes, absorbed in her thoughts. Then she shrugged her shoulders, opened her bag, and began to get ready for the night. Just before she went

to bed, she put out her lights, opened her door cautiously a crack, and looked out into the car. Dennis sat in the seat facing her.

"Want something?" he inquired.

With an exclamation that sounded like "*Damn*" she closed and locked her door.

At ten next morning he knocked.

"What is it?" she demanded crossly.

"Good morning"—genially—"what will you have for breakfast?"

"I don't want any."

"I am forced to ask your hospitality while I eat mine."

"You'll not come in here," she replied.

He lifted his eyebrows and smiled. He had eaten his breakfast at seven-thirty. The morning passed. At noon he repeated his question about her lunch. He received the same answer. He had his lunch served him, in his section, and he smoked on the platform hastily with his ear on the alert for any sound from the prisoner. She fasted for dinner, and he began to be anxious. However, he recalled tales of ranchmen lost for days without food. She stuck it out until noon of the next day. Then she admitted the porter, and Dennis followed on his heels as if nothing had happened. She looked white and big-eyed.

"I hope you feel able to join me in a little lunch. I've ordered soup, broiled chicken, baked apple, and coffee."

She merely inclined her head.

The porter finished his ministrations and left them. Dennis sat down opposite her. She looked at him coolly, as one would at a strange interloper. He was so clear-eyed and big and calm. She longed to hurl herself on him and bite and scratch. That he should force her into this position and act as if nothing had happened was almost more than her nerves could stand.

"I hope you have had a good rest," he returned.

She made no answer.

"You neither eat nor talk. I've underestimated your value as a wife."

"If you force your company upon me, I have to endure it, but I do not have to respond to your tiresome conversation," she retorted.

"True—perfectly true," he admitted.

The waiter arrived with the lunch. When it was spread before them, Dennis served her, in complete silence. He pantomimed invitation, he gestured inquiry in a most annoying way. He tried not to notice her ravenous appetite, as he ate his speechless way through

the meal. Later he offered her a cigarette, which she refused, and he smoked in silence. He called a train boy, who presented a pile of books for her choice. She chose two, nodded her thanks, and continued to stare out the window. Dennis took one of her books and read. The afternoon passed—a silent dinner was consumed, and at ten he rose.

"I've had a fine time. You are a most restful companion," he observed. "Good-night."

When she shut the porter out she slammed the door. Dennis laughed out loud at her childishness, and it was with that hateful sound in her ears that she went to sleep.

The fourth day she broke the silence.

"Has it occurred to you that I may need some other clothes than these?"

"Yes. I ordered a trunk sent to Los Angeles on the train that follows us. We'll pick it up before we go to the ranch."

"*A* trunk? *One* trunk?"

"I ordered one trunk of riding and sport clothes, with some heavy shoes and thick sweaters. That is all you will need."

"I will buy what I want in Los Angeles," she remarked.

"We may stay there only a few hours," he said.

"I will not leave Los Angeles until I buy what I need," she said hotly.

"I've ordered what you need"—calmly.

"Oh!"

She took up a book and ignored him for an hour. Then she glanced up and caught his eye.

"Don't you think it would be more comfortable, since we have two or three months, maybe longer, of uninterrupted companionship ahead of us, to cut out the hostilities?"

She made no answer, just looked up the page of her book.

"It doesn't make any difference to me," he said cheerfully, "but it seems to be very hard on your nerves and temper."

If she could have seen the wire he sent Judge Tracey that night, she might have attempted his life. It read:

Will not stop in Los Angeles. Go direct to Santa Rosa. Marcia well and happy. So am I.

DENNIS SHAWN.

As they neared their destination Dennis increased his assiduity as a guard. He thought Marcia was probably planning to escape, if she could, when they reached the city, where any signs of coercion would attract attention.

He decided not to stop at all—just to take a train out to the village and thus avoid danger. There was an hour between connections, however, so he wired Chuck, and then he bundled his captive into a taxi and motored her about the city. She showed only the slightest interest.

As they were getting on to the local train the gods favoured Dennis. Mr. Maxwell of the Great Western was getting off it.

"Ah, Mr. Maxwell—how are you?" cried Dennis. "Just back from New York with my bride. Mr. Maxwell, Mrs. Shawn."

Before Marcia could speak or Mr. Maxwell could recover, Dennis had her in the car and out of his sight. She turned her eyes upon him.

"If you dare to do that again I shall deny it!"

"Very good—if you prefer to travel as my mistress."

According to orders, Chuck had the Ford runabout sitting in front of the station. Dennis, greeted by the station agent and a few stragglers, helped Marcia in, piled in the bags, gave orders about trunks, and took the driver's seat.

"Luxurious car you drive," said Marcia.

"We don't go in much for luxury out here," he answered.

It was a very beautiful drive down the valley, but Marcia had no eyes for it. After a bit they began to climb, the road was rough, and the old Ford jolted and bumped and rattled. After a long time, with the country growing wilder every minute, they came to a place where Dennis stopped.

"This is as far as my car will go. We have to walk the rest of the way."

They got out and he led the way toward a steep trail.

"Bring the bags," she ordered.

"The Chinaman will bring them," he replied.

Up and up they went—an endless way, it seemed to Marcia. Finally they came out on a hilltop, where a rude cabin was perched.

"Here we are!" said Dennis.

"But this isn't Santa Rosa ranch house!" she protested.

"No—this is a lonely retreat for you and me," he replied.

"I will not enter that hut!" she cried.

He went on toward it.

"Just as you like. The nights are rather cold and we are exactly twelve miles from the nearest neighbour."

He went into the cabin and began to build a fire.

CHAPTER XVIII

SHAWN'S words had their effect, and Marcia followed him into the shack. It was a one-room affair originally, but heavy burlap was hung across one end of it to make another room. The kitchen was a shed at the rear. There were four bunks about the walls, and a fireplace at one end of the big room. There had evidently been a recent effort to add to its charms. A fur rug on the floor and a few chairs and a table were in evidence. In the improvised bedchamber, surrounded by the burlap, were a washstand, a mirror, and a chair. A mattress and bedclothes were provided for the bunk. A few nails had been driven into the walls for clothes hooks.

But these details entirely escaped Marcia's eyes. She only saw a bare shack which she was apparently expected to occupy with this man whom she hated.

"Those are your quarters over there," he said, indicating the burlapped section.

"Where do you sleep?"

"In one of those bunks."

"If I had known I was coming to this unspeakable place I would have jumped out of the train," she said.

"Oh, this isn't so bad when you get used to it," he comforted her.

"Does it seem to you worth your while to go through all this to save Judge Tracey some possible embarrassment?"

He looked her in the eyes directly.

"Eminently," he said.

"Do you propose to hold me a prisoner until that case is tried?"

"I intend to see that for once in your life you stick to an agreement. You brought the prisoner part on yourself."

"Do you expect to sit here and watch me for a few months?"

"Bless you, no—I've got too much to do. I've got a Chinaman to watch you. You'll have all the liberty you can be trusted with. Toy is a faithful Chink, who will follow at your heels. He's not very fluent in English, but he can listen to your troubles and improve his vocabulary."

"I can kill myself!"

He glanced at her.

"Yes—I suppose you could, if you cared

enough about it. It never occurred to me that a Livingston could be a quitter."

"Do you enjoy coercing a helpless woman?" she inquired.

He was kneeling on the hearth coaxing the fire. He looked up at her and smiled.

"It is hard to think of you as a helpless woman. But as for coercing you, I don't mind. You had a chance to do this thing on your own terms. I agreed to do it your way, although I hated your way. You broke faith—now you're going to do it my way."

"You *are* amusing," she said insolently.

"You must be glad of that," he replied. "Now I will have the kitchen fire going in ten minutes, so you'd better get ready to cook us some supper."

She stared at him.

"Cook supper? I don't intend to cook supper."

"All right. Get the rules down now! Everybody works out here. We don't have any drones. Your job is to keep the cabin clean and cook the meals. I'll tend the fires and get the provisions, and do any heavy work that you can't manage——"

"I won't so much as lift my hand," she cried.

"That's up to you. If you don't work you don't eat. You tried fasting on the train, and my impression was you didn't care for it."

"I'd rather die than be your servant."

"Good Lord, don't be a fool! You do your job and I'll do mine, that's all there is to it. That's the way it is in the real world. That false, artificial world you've lived in is just a show. Wake up and see what fun life is when you've got a job."

He went into the lean-to and she heard him chopping kindling and whistling cheerfully. She sat on and contemplated the situation. She was not going to submit, but she had no clear idea of how to resist.

She went into the burlap room and looked about. She took off her hat and coat and hung them up and washed her face and hands in the tin wash bowl and sat down on the kitchen chair. All was absolutely still, save for Dennis's preparations in the kitchen. The odour of bacon frying began to permeate the air—and of coffee boiling. She was hungry and tired and mad. She wanted to cry.

Dennis watched for her anxiously, but she did not appear, so he ate his supper, washed the dishes, and went to smoke before the fire.

"Would you like a candle?" he called to her.

"No."

"Better come out here by the fire—it's pleasanter. I won't talk to you," he added.

But she was committed to war now and she wouldn't give in. She managed to make up her bunk and get into it. It was hard and hateful and finally the tears came, from sheer exhaustion.

Dennis heard her stifled sobs, and shook his head.

"Poor little devil!" he muttered to himself. But he, too, was committed to war.

She did not stir in the morning when he got his breakfast. But before he left the shack he called to her cheerfully.

"Good morning! Toy will be just outside the door if you want him. If you should want to cook the dinner, he knows where the supplies are cached. They are all hid, but he knows where. I'll be back about twelve o'clock."

She heard him speak to Toy and go away. She lay still and tried to think of ways of escape. She got up, determined to see whether she could bribe the Chinaman.

When she stepped to the door, he rose and bowed ceremoniously. She said a few words

to him, but he only smiled and shook his head. Obviously he did not understand.

She lifted her eyes to the superb panorama spread before her where mountains and valleys lay in the sun at her feet. The crisp air was full of tang and autumn smells. She wandered off a little way and sat down.

Dennis came up the trail on horseback at twelve. She watched him come. He waved a friendly hand at sight of her, which she ignored.

"Some day, isn't it?" he remarked, when he dismounted near her. She made no reply. "I suppose you'd rather look at traffic cops on Fifth Avenue. Are you still on a diet?" he added.

As she made no answer, he went inside, prepared his meal, ate it, and departed. This programme was repeated for three days. Then he grew really anxious.

"Look here," he said, "I agree that you're making a good fight against doing what you don't want to do. Also, it takes a mighty good sport to admit defeat. But you've got too much sense to make yourself sick, in order to prove that you aren't beaten. If you go on starving, I'll get a doctor up here to feed you forcibly, like they did the suffragettes. Believe me, you won't like that."

"But you would!"

"No, I would not. I don't like any of this business. I'm just as disappointed as you are mad, because I thought you were a real woman, in spite of all your silliness. But I know now you're just a doll with sawdust insides."

"I'm sure it would never occur to you that your opinion of me was of no interest."

"If you want the doctor and the stomach pump, it's up to you. I'll telephone Los Angeles to-morrow."

"I don't know how to cook," she said.

"I'll be glad to show you. It's pretty simple grub up here, so it's easy to cook."

The fourth day, so weak she could hardly walk, Marcia presented herself at the kitchen door when Dennis was about to prepare breakfast. She staggered and fell into his arms and came to later, lying on the fur rug before the fire, while he held her head and administered hot milk.

"All right," he said comfortingly. "Have to go a little slow after a fast like that."

She lay still, under her blanket, and he went on with the breakfast. But he sent the Chinaman off with a message and he stayed at the shack. Every two hours he brought her warm

milk with brandy in it. He talked along cheerfully, apparently not noticing that now and then the tears rolled down her cheeks. At noon she had milk toast.

As the sun warmed up he dragged her mattress out on to the porch of the shack and without asking leave he carried her, fur rug, blanket, and all, and laid her out in the sun. He sat not far off and cleaned a rifle with meticulous care. She watched him idly, too weak to hate him. The wonder and beauty of the autumn world about them made it seem madness to wish to leave it. When he came with her milk she glanced at him.

"Why do you bother?" she asked.

"Wouldn't you hate to leave that?" indicating the whole landscape.

He watched over her that day and the next. She was able to walk about the shack by that time. Then he introduced her, without comment, to the kitchen department. He taught her to cook bacon, eggs, and coffee first. The first time she accomplished it alone, and set it on the table before him, he said cordially:

"Good work!"

She sat down opposite him and ate, without reply. Her appetite came with returning

strength, and the keen morning air made her ravenous.

Dennis helped her with the dinners until she "got the hang of it" as he said. A chicken or wild fowl, potatoes, and a pie or flapjacks constituted the more elaborate meals but she soon mastered their preparation. She asked him to get her a cook book. Their joint efforts in the kitchen had done away with her vow of silence, and they talked impersonally about the events of the day. If he showed any special effort to be friendly, she gave him a sharp reminder of their drawn swords.

Once he came back for something he had forgotten and found her sweeping out the cabin, he stood a minute packing his pipe.

"You're a good sport!" he said to her admiringly, and to her intense annoyance she flushed.

But the truth was that, once having capitulated so far as doing her share in the shack, she flung herself into her new duties with relief. She swept and cleaned with ardour. When the cook book came she devoted herself to culinary experiments, to Dennis's great amusement.

"By Jove, you're getting to be a regular chef!" he exclaimed one night, over a new dish.

True to his word, she had as much liberty as she could use. To be sure, Toy was always a few paces behind her. But she wandered through the woods and brought in great branches to decorate the cabin. She grew strong and rested and relaxed. She grew used to Dennis's comings and goings—his cheerful talk, his whistling and singing. She was so tired at night that the hard bunk was as eiderdown. One day merged into the next, and every day she said to herself:

"To-morrow I'll try to escape!"

But to-morrow was always—to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE Dennis Shawn was beginning the belated discipline of Marcia, up in the shack, Judge Tracey was enduring a most anxious time in New York. The part of Providence is never a comfortable rôle, as he confided to Mary Jane Paul. She was the one serene person among the three intimates of Marcia. She assured the Judge that he need not worry at all—that Dennis Shawn was the man for Marcia, and that he knew how to manage her. Jessup haunted Judge Tracey's office. He felt sure there was some mystery. He could not understand why Marcia did not write. If, as the Judge said, she had merely decided to spend these necessary months of waiting at Santa Rosa, that was no reason why she should go without saying good-bye and disappear without any explanation. He was determined to go to California and investigate. It was all the Judge could do to hold him back.

When the first real letter arrived from Dennis

the Judge summoned Mary Jane Paul to enjoy it with him:

DEAR JUDGE:

I have been so busy with things on the ranch and with Miss Livingston that I have only been able to send you telegrams, and one short note. But I want you to know just how things are out here. The trip across country, as I told you, was pretty stormy. I convinced her at the outset that if she made a scene, every paper in the country would feature our story on the front page and she'd have to stay married to me to live it down! That settled her—she decided to make the trip and fix me later. I was afraid of Los Angeles, so we came straight through and I took her up to that shack in the mountains where you have spent the night, no doubt when you were hunting out here. It's pretty crude, but I figured that she would manage to get away if I took her to the ranch house. She didn't like it at the shack, but I pointed out to her that I had been willing to go through this thing her way and that she had broken faith with us, so now she'd have to do it my way.

"That wonderful man!" interrupted Mary Jane.

Then I explained to her that out here everybody had to work. Her job was to keep the cabin clean and cook. You see, Judge, I figured that if that girl was ever made to do something, she might turn out all right. Well, we had considerable ructions. She said she wouldn't do a thing and I said she'd have to work if she intended

to eat. So we had a three-day hunger strike that nearly finished us both, but she came round finally and now she's getting to be a real good cook. She cleans up the shack and works around just like anybody. She still keeps up a show of fight, but it's not so fierce.

Judge, I don't mind telling you that this marriage you "sheenanigined" me into is *permanent*, if I can manage it!

Williams is going to Los Angeles this week to see our lawyers about our case.

Give my regards to Miss Paul. She's the real thing. A little later you might bring her out here.

Best wishes to yourself,

Sincerely,
DENNIS SHAWN.

The two conspirators looked at each other a second, and then they laughed.

"Marcia cooking and tending a shack!" cried Mary Jane.

"She'll never forgive me," sighed the Judge.

"Judge, you're such a timorous Providence! I think the whole thing is perfect. I prophesy your Dennis Shawn will discover the Marcia you and I have believed in."

"I hope so—I certainly hope so," he said earnestly.

Dennis had vouchsafed not one word of explanation to Chuck and Williams as to his reason for living in the shack, or as to his com-

panion. They had carried out his orders in preparing the place for occupancy with much curiosity. They heard in the village that Dennis had brought a lady with him, and they had to stand much interrogation on the point. They saw him every day, but he never referred to the subject at all.

It was the end of the second week of Marcia's confinement in the shack that he broke the silence.

"I suppose you fellows think it's a little queer that I haven't said anything about moving up to the shack, but I didn't know how long I'd be there or just what kind of a pickle I was in. You see, I've got Miss Livingston up there——"

"No!" from Chuck excitedly.

So Dennis began at the beginning and told the whole story from the time of his arrival in New York. The two men sat spellbound during the tale.

"You grabbed her and carried her off to that shack?" exclaimed Chuck.

"Roughly speaking, yes," smiled Dennis.

"What are you going to do with her now?" inquired Williams.

"I'm going to keep her up there a little longer and then I'm going to bring her down to the ranch house."

"Want us to move out?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll give her my room and bunk in with you, Chuck, if you don't mind."

"Of course. Can't we come to see her?"

"No. She'd wheedle you into helping her get away and I don't intend she shall get away."

"Has she tried to escape?"

"Not yet. But I'm prepared for anything."

"Gosh! This is exciting!" said Chuck. "Do you keep her chained up?"

"She wanders around, with Toy to watch her," Dennis answered, smiling.

"Say, if this ever got into the papers——" said Williams.

"Yes—well, it must not," remarked Dennis. "That's one reason the shack is safer."

"Nobody knows she's there but Toy?"

"No, and Toy is short on English."

Williams was called away and Dennis said to Chuck:

"What's become of Kate?"

"Luckily for you she's cleared out. She asked me about you all the time at first, after you left, and then she disappeared. Nobody seems to know where she went."

"It's just as well," sighed Dennis, and it was a sigh of relief.

"Say, Dennis, move your family down as soon as you can, won't you? Gee, it will be good to talk to a regular girl again. Is she a beauty, Denny?"

"Yes, I think she is."

"You lucky old Irishman!"

"She's got no use for me, Chuck. She hates the sight of me."

"Honest?"

"Honest."

"Well, of all the damned things!"

"Much obliged, Chuck," laughed Dennis. "I won't be down to-morrow," he added. "Got some work to do up at the shack."

"Here, wait a minute." Chuck darted across the patio and came back with a tiny fluff-ball of a kitten. "Take this to your prisoner for a playmate, old man."

Dennis laughed, tucked the kitten in his pocket, and rode away. Marcia was standing in the door as he came up the trail, and she gave his horse a lump of sugar before Dennis led him away.

"I shall steal a horse and ride all over that valley down there before I run away," she said.

"You're going to run away, are you?"

"Certainly."

He smiled at her.

"I brought you a present," he said, presenting the white fluff-ball.

"Oh—how cunning!" she exclaimed, and cuddled it under her chin. "Much obliged," she said, as he moved away.

The sight of her there, in the sunset at the cabin door, with the kitten under her chin, was a pleasant thing, thought Dennis, as he unsaddled his horse.

The "present" was a great success. After supper she pursued a string, chased her tail, and did all the tricks peculiar to the cat family. She made Marcia laugh aloud once and Dennis was grateful for that. He sat and smoked and watched them as they played together on the fur rug before the fire.

He thought of the Marcia of the Long Island house party and smiled. She glanced up at the moment and intercepted it. She frowned.

"It's nothing to make you angry," he defended himself. "I was just thinking how sweet you looked, there on the floor, with the kitten."

She swept up the present and rose.

"I consider it impertinent for you to think about me at all!"—haughtily.

"Yes? Well, I think about you a great deal," he said calmly.

"I'd like you to remember that I am here under duress. That I hate the place, and you. I am your enemy, and I'll get away the first chance I have!"—hotly.

She went into the burlap room and nothing more was seen of her that night. Dennis sat on for an hour or more thinking, smiling sometimes.

The morning proved wonderful as wine. Dennis looked down into the valley and made a resolve.

"Aren't you late to-day?" Marcia asked, as he made no move to go.

"If I take you down to explore that valley, will you give me your word not to try to run away?" he asked, smiling.

"No. I'd run if I got a chance."

He laughed at her earnestness.

"I see I shall have to take a risk. I'm game. Toy has gone to get you a horse."

"Really?" She flushed with pleasure and hurried into her room to hide it.

Presently he called to her:

"Miss Enemy, we are ready when you are!"

She came out in riding breeches and boots

and a soft hat. She fed the horses sugar, and climbed to her saddle without his help.

"You go ahead," she called.

"No, thanks," he smiled. "I prefer to keep an eye on you. You go ahead."

She laughed and led the way. Slowly they picked their way down the mountainside. An autumn haze softened the distant range. The air was fresh, even though the sun felt hot on the back.

"Strike off cross-country—never mind the trails," Dennis called to her. She obeyed and he came along beside her. He was at his best in the saddle, and she looked up at him with reluctant admiration. He belonged here among these mountains—he had in him something of their calm, their power. A remark the Judge had made to her once came to her mind: "Put Clarke Jessup up against Dennis Shawn and give yourself a good laugh!" She frowned at the memory.

"I hoped we had left the frown at the cabin," he said.

"I suppose you'll make me go back unless I'm cheerful?" she inquired.

"Yes—make you go back, or choke you, or abandon you in the wilderness. How well you know my methods!"

"Why not? I've had to endure them for nearly four weeks."

"Is that all? It seems always since that wedding."

"You flatter me! Do you know anything more about when the case comes to trial?"

"No. Williams, one of my assistants, is going to Los Angeles to-morrow to find out what he can from our lawyer there."

"I'd like to see him when he comes back," she said imperiously.

He made no answer to that. For hours they rode through the quiet beauty. They forded streams, climbed up and down hills, with never a sign of human creature or of man's destructive hand. Dennis produced sandwiches and chocolate from a knapsack for their lunch and they ate beside a brook. Then they headed for home and galloped on level stretches and slowly climbed the hills. It was about sunset when they struck the trail to the cabin. Toy sat on guard as usual, with the kitten in his lap.

"Well," said Marcia, as she dismounted, "it has been a good day."

"You enjoyed it?" he demanded.

"Yes"—reluctantly.

"Am I to understand by that 'yes'—'Thank you so much, Dennis, for a lovely day'?"

She shrugged her shoulders. She went indoors and dropped down on the rug with her plaything. But its antics did not altogether hold her attention. A fear had suddenly lifted its head in her mind—the fear that she was not hating Dennis Shawn as much as she intended to. She must not let him break down her resistance. She must be on her guard. She dropped her head on her arm to think about that—but the long day in the open air was not conducive to clear thought. The kitten curled up against her face, and its purr was soothing.

It was so that Dennis found them when he came in. He stood looking down at them for several moments before he laid his blanket over her.

His lips moved, and he muttered something that sounded suspiciously like:

"God bless ye, dear little Enemy!"

But of course he was sure she was sleeping very soundly!

CHAPTER XX

THAT day spent together in the open marked a crisis in the relations of Dennis and Marcia. To the man it opened up vistas of a future which contained many such days spent with this fascinating companion, who was so much the centre of his thoughts and hopes. To Marcia the day held a warning. She swept away all the little unconscious intimacies that had grown up between them. She became the silent, frowning Marcia of the early days. Dennis could not understand it—he catechized himself to discover how he had offended her.

Marcia fled from the cabin, in the hope of fleeing her troubled thoughts. She led Toy a wild chase, far and wide. In her riding breeches and sweater, with the kitten perched on her shoulder, she tramped for miles. It was on such an expedition that she stood on a rock that jutted out from the hillside and looked off into the vastness, talking to the kitten as was her wont.

All at once she saw a rider galloping below her. At first she thought it was Dennis, as he was the only man she had ever seen about, but a second glance showed her that this was no such horseman as Dennis. He evidently saw her, outlined against the hill, for he slowed his horse. Impulsively she waved to him—he waved back and to her surprise put his horse straight up the hill where she stood. Toy watched it, too. He proved to be a nice, fresh-looking boy, who dismounted beside her with a bow.

"Good morning," he said. "I'm Chuck English. Fine day, isn't it?"

"Yes. Where do you come from, Mr. English?"

"Santa Rosa. I'm 'Man Friday' to Dennis Shawn. D'ye mean to say that old clam hasn't told you about me?"

"Not a word," she smiled. "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes—Mrs. Shawn."

She started.

"I'm still called Miss Livingston," she corrected him. "Are you Western?" she inquired.

"No—fresh off Broadway last spring—but I'm living it down."

"Do you like it out here?"

"I should say I do. This is the life! I'm almost as nutty about Santa Rosa as Dennis. It's *real* out here, Miss Livingston, and the men are real. The only thing we need is some real women. That's why I was so anxious to come see you," he added.

"Why didn't you?"

"Well—I—that is——"

"Mr. Shawn forbade it."

"He said: 'A little later'," defended Chuck.

She laughed.

"Doesn't anybody ever defy King Shawn?" she inquired.

"I don't know. Everybody loves him out here; I suppose we all want to do things his way. He's a prince, Miss Livingston," added the boy enthusiastically.

"He seems to be the whole royal family. Who else lives at Santa Rosa?"

"Harvey Williams, a good old grouch of a fellow. He's secretary and treasurer and first assistant."

"What do you do?"

"Oh, I just herd around with Dennis and run errands."

"He told you about me?"

"Not until a few days ago. We were bu'sting with curiosity, but not a word until he was ready. Swore us to secrecy then. He'll skin me for talking to you, probably, but I thought *maybe* you beckoned a little when you waved."

"I think I did. Come up and see me at the cabin. In spite of your king's orders, I still run my own affairs," she said.

"Much obliged—maybe I can manage it. I'm glad you're here, Miss Livingston. See you again."

He mounted and went off, turning to wave her a farewell.

She startled Dennis at noon by remarking:

"I asked Chuck English to come and see me."

"Where did you see Chuck?" he demanded.

"Oh, off down there. I don't remember the street corner."

"Hm!"

"You needn't row him about it. I waved to him and he thought I wanted him. Selfish of you to keep such a nice boy to yourself."

"Did you ask him to help you get away?"—idly.

"Oh, no—I didn't need his help. I'll go when I get ready."

"I hope we can induce you to stay on awhile."

"You must make it more amusing for me, then. Mr. English and Mr. Williams to dinner now and then might help you out."

"I wouldn't trust either of them with you."

"You do think highly of my charms!"

"I do."

"I assure you your assistants are quite safe."

"I prefer to make up my own mind on that subject."

"Are you labouring under the delusion that these Petruchio manners of yours make you attractive? Women have changed a bit since Shakespeare's time. I am no Katherine——"

Dennis smoked a bit before he hazarded:

"I think women are about the same."

"That, Mr. Shawn, is the mistake that will prove your undoing."

"We'll see," he said coolly.

She hated him most when he was like this, and in her moods of wavering about him, she chivvied him into this manner, so she could hate him more.

Into this situation which Dennis believed he had in hand stalked the unexpected in the person of Kate. She arrived at the cabin one afternoon, gave Toy to understand that she brought a message from Shawn, and was ad-

mitted to the shack where Marcia was at work. She turned at Kate's entrance, and they faced each other a second before she spoke. She felt this handsome, foreign-looking creature was hostile to her, but she was glad of a human being to speak to.

"Do you want to see me?" Marcia asked.

"You marry Dennis Shawn?" Kate demanded.

"Y-yes."

"No good. Dennis Shawn my man."

"Who are you?"

"Kate my name."

"You say Dennis Shawn is married to you?"

"Huh—no priest—but marry all right."

"You mean you live with him—as his wife?"

"Yes, live with me till he go 'way—get you. No good. He come back to me. Kate love Dennis Shawn—get him back."

Marcia thought quickly.

"Where do you live?"

"Down by quarters at Santa Rosa. You love Dennis Shawn?" inquired Kate.

"You say you want him back?"

"Yes."

"Help me get away from here and you can have him!"

"You go 'way?"

"Yes. Can you get me a horse and show me the way to the village?"

"Me? Yes."

"Could you do it to-night?"

Kate stared at her.

"You go—to-night?"—unbelieving.

"Yes. You ride to the foot of the hill, down there"—she drew her to the back door to indicate the place—"and have a horse for me. Be there at dark by that tallest tree. Wait till I come. I'll give you money——"

"Don't want money—want Dennis Shawn."

"You can have him—and *welcome!* Now you'd better go. He must not know you've been here."

"You fool give up Dennis Shawn," remarked Kate as she left.

Toy ignored orders and met Dennis at the foot of the trail when he came up. He pointed to the shack and said something which Dennis finally understood.

"Kate!" he exclaimed, and hurried on up to the shack.

Marcia in riding breeches and a soft shirt was bending over the stove when he burst in.

"Marcia!" he exclaimed.

She stood up and stared at him.

"Are you all right?"

"Certainly. Why not?"—coolly.

"Did any one—was any one here?"

"Oh, yes—your mistress came to call," she replied, giving her attention to potatoes in the oven.

"Damn her insolence! What did she want?" he demanded.

"She was curious about me. I don't wonder."

A sort of despair came over Dennis's face.

"Oh, you won't understand——" he began.

She stood up and faced him.

"I don't wish to understand! I'm not interested in your mistresses."

She passed him with food which she put on the table. He followed her.

"Please listen to me. Give me a chance——"

She went into her room and left him. He gave an exclamation of rage, then she heard him call Toy and give him orders. From her window she saw him saddle his horse and put him down the trail. She smiled. Then she hurried to the table and forced herself to eat a good meal. She called Toy in to serve her. When she finished she ordered him to wash up. She hummed, and talked at the dumb Chinaman, waiting for dark to come with her moment to escape.

She went in to her room, put on her thickest sweater under her coat, tucked the little revolver Dennis had given her into her belt. She whistled loudly to throw Toy off the scent. The kitten came mewing at her door and she kissed it good-bye.

"Make big fire, Toy," she called to him.

He grunted acquiescence.

She crawled out the window of her room and ran for the woods. Every crackling leaf and twig terrified her lest it meant Toy in pursuit. She stumbled and scrambled over fallen trees and through underbrush, and down toward the spot where Kate was to be waiting. If she should not be there! If it was all a lie she had told her that afternoon! No—it was true. Dennis had admitted it—his anger had confirmed it. He had gone down to settle with Kate, but Kate was settling with him. It choked her to think that she had almost come to like this man—this man whose taste in women was a handsome half-breed! Oh—she hated him now! If she had needed a flick to her antagonism Kate had supplied it. She would die now, rather than go back to that cabin! Down and down she went; apparently Toy was not following her. At the foot of the

hill sat Kate on a horse, holding the bridle of another.

"Kate!" called Marcia.

"Yes—here," came the answer.

"Good for you!" Marcia exclaimed, almost sobbing with excitement.

She mounted the horse as fast as she could.

"Let's go to the village," she said.

"No, Dennis Shawn go there—catch you. I know place where train stops—no station. Go there."

Marcia peered at her in the darkness.

"Kate, don't you play tricks on me. You put me on train and you'll never see me again, but if you don't——"

Kate laughed.

"Come on," she said, and led off at a gallop. Marcia followed into the blackness of the falling night—into the unknown.

CHAPTER XXI

THERE was black fury in Dennis's heart as he rode back to Santa Rosa in search of Kate. Fury at himself that he had succumbed to Kate in the first place, fury that he appeared in such a poor light to Marcia, fury at Kate for telling her—the whole thing was unendurable. The memory of the anger and hate in Marcia's eyes burnt into his mind.

The men were coming out of the mess hall down at the quarters. He had never gone deliberately to Kate's cabin before, but he was too anxious to give her marching orders to wait for a more discreet visit. But the cabin was empty. He took occasion to talk to some of the men, in order to stay in the neighbourhood and watch for her return. But there were no signs of her.

He was just about to mount and go back up the hill when along the road to the ranch came a man on the gallop. Dennis waited to see who he was. At sight of the manager the man drew up.

"Fire," he said, "in big forest No. 6 on Padrasso Ranch."

"Where were you when you saw it?" Dennis asked.

"Going to village for McKim, at mills."

"Did you warn any one?"

"No, came here quick to tell you."

"All right. Boys," called Dennis to men who had crowded around, "get out all the horses there are and follow. Bring axes! Tell Mr. English and Williams to come as fast as they can. Telephone McKim for men and axes. Sound the fire alarm. I'll go ahead," he cried, giving his horse the spur.

Meanwhile, across the country, in the darkness, the horses of the two women ran. It seemed a miracle to Marcia that they kept their feet at all. Kate's plan was to flag a train, at a spot where the engine slowed down, and to get Marcia aboard. A train went through, she calculated, at 9:20. That meant fast riding to make it. There was a rough road cut through the big forest on the Padrasso Ranch, along which the logs were hauled. She decided to cross-cut by taking that road.

They had exchanged only a few sentences.

"Where is Dennis Shawn?" Kate had demanded.

"He went to find you, I think."

"You told him?"

"No. Toy must have told."

"He was mad?"

"Yes."

They plunged into the forest, where the darkness was thick as fog.

"You know the way, Kate?"—anxiously.

"Yes."

Marcia dared not look into the dense blackness on either side. The great trees stood solid as cliffs with the road cut between them. Things scuttled and moved there, queer sounds came from there, it was terrifying—but Kate seemed oblivious and kept her horse at a trot.

Presently the horses sniffed and whinnied softly. Kate's horse swerved—but she kicked him smartly and put him ahead.

"What is it?" Marcia called to her.

Her horse began to show great nervousness. All at once Kate stopped and Marcia almost plunged into her.

"Kate, are we lost?"

"Smoke," was the reply.

The trees were so tall that you could not see

above them, but the smell grew closer, more acrid.

"Turn—go back!" ordered Kate.

But before they could do so, by one of those freaks of fire, flame leaped from some unseen source, and as if by magic, a tall tree just before them suddenly flamed like a torch. With a scream of terror the ponies bolted and ran. Kate's dashed off to the left—Marcia's wheeled, ran for a little on the road, then as the smoke followed, he left the road, rushed in among the trees—and—that was all Marcia knew.

Dennis came to the edge of the forest, forgetful of everything but this danger to his trees. For several moments he had seen big puffs of smoke and an occasional tongue of flame. The wind was blowing in the direction to endanger the whole forest unless the men could stop it before it was under way. He had heard the fire siren scream as he rode, so he knew the men were all on the way now.

He rode into the wood, alternately speaking comfort to his trembling horse and spurring him. He was determined to see just where the danger line lay. Suddenly he heard a horse whinny. He drew up.

"Any one there?" he called.

Again the horse cried—it was in among the trees to the right.

Dennis dismounted, tied his horse, took out his bung-hole lamp, and went slowly toward the sound.

"Where are you?" he called.

There was a groan but no answer. He went on, feeling his way, and then his light fell on a horse lying where he had fallen, and thrown to one side, unconscious, lay the rider. He hurried to bend over him, and then—

"Marcia!" he exclaimed, "Marcia!"

He dropped down beside her and began to feel for her heart-beat. She groaned again. He lifted her and put brandy to her lips—she stirred and moaned. He looked at the horse. His foreleg was broken and the poor thing was in agony. He shot him and turned to pick up the girl. At the sound of the shot she had stirred and cried out. He took her up gently and carried her to the road. He sat down there to wait for help. He could never get her to the ranch on his horse—but the men would bring a motor.

How had she come there? Was she alone? What had happened to her? These questions

knocked at the door of his mind, but he did not try to answer them. The thing now was to get her somewhere and find out how seriously she was hurt.

When the men came presently, it was Chuck who found him there.

"Dennis!" he cried.

"Help me get her into a motor. We'll go to the Padrasso Ranch—it's nearer."

"Is she dead?"

"No."

"But how——?"

"I don't know. Bring my horse—I can carry her better myself."

They came out into the group of men getting into slickers and helmets and choosing their axes.

"Clear that car quick, boys. There's been an accident here," ordered Chuck.

They obeyed, and the two men got Marcia into the back seat.

"I'll go with her, Chuck. Let one of the men run the car. You and Williams take charge here. I'll come back as soon as I can," said Dennis.

At the Padrasso's they had to arouse the old servant who had gone to bed. Dennis despaired of making her understand—he just carried

Marcia into the señorita's room and ordered the maid to help him get her into bed. He telephoned the village doctor to come at once and to order a nurse to follow. He had the old woman undress her, but she did not regain consciousness. Dennis sat beside her, his hand on her inert hand, and it seemed to him that aeons of time passed before the doctor came. Time to go over all the past with its folly. Why had he blundered into this girl's life, to bring her in the end to such disaster? If she died—what was to become of him?

"Marcia—don't die," he whispered to her. "Don't die until I've proved how much I love you!"

But the white face held no sign of life, only the faint breathing showed she lived.

How could she have ridden out there in those woods alone? Where was she going? How had she escaped Toy? His brain ground it out over and over again.

At last the doctor came. He made an endless examination it seemed to Dennis, who waited in the next room. When he could bear the silence no longer he went to the door.

"Seems to be a concussion. Must have struck on her head. There's a fractured arm,

and some bad bruises. I'd like to have somebody else look at her, Mr. Shawn."

"I'll telephone Los Angeles for any one you say. Will she live?" Dennis asked him.

"I should say she had a strong constitution, hasn't she?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Is she some relation to you, Mr. Shawn?"

"She is my wife," Dennis answered.

"Oh! So? I didn't know you were married."

"It was a secret marriage—suppose you call the doctor you want, now. I'll stay with her."

The other man left the room and Dennis knelt beside her. There was no change in her face.

"Marcia—dearest," he pled, his face against her hand.

When the doctor came back, Dennis said to him:

"Is there anything on earth I can do for her?"

"No."

"Will you stay here until I get back?"

"You have to go——?"

"My forests are on fire, I must go and see what headway the men make, unless I can be of use to her."

"No—so long as she lies like this, we can only watch and wait, Mr. Shawn."

"Then I must go. I'll be back as soon as possible. What time can your consulting doctor get here?"

"There's a 7:30 out of Los Angeles in the morning. I asked him to take that."

"I'll be here when he comes."

Dennis got into the waiting car outside, where the impatient driver sat.

"Is it all right, Mr. Shawn?" he inquired.

"She's still unconscious. Now, boy, let's make a record. I must see what they're doing over there."

The smoke filled all the sky now, and flames shot high and pierced the black like swords. The lilliputians who hacked and dug pits and swarmed on the edge of the hungry monster seemed as useless, as harmless as flies. Dennis ran in among them, counselling, ordering this or that. He seized an axe himself and fell upon a great tree with frenzy.

CHAPTER XXII

DENNIS lived through the days that followed like a man in purgatory. The fire ate its way slowly, surreptitiously, or leapt like a demon. The men worked night and day—help was sent from the village and all the surrounding district. This was a danger to the whole country round and men rallied from everywhere to fight it.

In the big silent bedroom of the old Señorita Padrasso Marcia lay, raving and chattering, knowing no one. The specialist from Los Angeles pronounced it a concussion. Two nurses were installed, and he was to come down from Los Angeles every other day, or at any time he was summoned.

Dennis wired Judge Tracey as follows:

Marcia thrown from horse, suffered concussion of the brain. Specialist and trained nurses in charge. Can you and Miss Paul come? Advise Jessup not to come out. Marcia raves against him in her delirium. Doctor wants nothing to disturb her.

DENNIS SHAWN.

The Judge answered:

Miss Paul and I leaving to-day 20th Century Limited, keep us posted Santa Fe Limited leaving Chicago 7:30 P. M. Jessup not with us.

HORACE TRACEY.

About every two hours Dennis came to Marcia's beside hoping for some change. But she lay in a sort of stupor, or talked incessantly. She looked at him, but without recognition. She argued about her marriage to Jessup, insisting it was a good thing. Then she urged Clarke to free her.

"I can't marry you, Clarke. I can't do it," she said passionately, over and over.

Then she raved against Dennis. She would escape—she must get away.

"I hate him! I hate him. He lives with Kate—Kate is his wife——"

"Oh, Marcia, listen to me. This is Dennis—don't you know me?"

"Kate is his wife! I hate him!" was her answer.

It was no use—she neither heard nor understood. The nurses assured him it meant nothing—that such a patient often turned against those dearest to them, but he sensed their curiosity and disliked it.

Out in the fire-swept district he worked like a fiend. Chuck and Williams could not induce him to eat or sleep properly. He seemed determined to drive himself beyond the limit of endurance.

It was a hollow-eyed, gaunt man who hurried to greet the Judge and Miss Paul on their arrival at the ranch.

"Dennis, my boy!" exclaimed the Judge. "You look half dead!"

"We've had a terrible time, Judge. Marcia's accident and this fire—the worst one we've ever had——"

"How is Marcia?" Mary Jane asked as she took his hand.

"No change. She just lies there."

"How did it happen, Dennis? Why did you bring her here?" the Judge inquired.

"She ran away, Judge. I don't know how she managed it, or who helped her. I had a faithful Chinaman guarding her. He says she got out the window of her room and she must have had a horse waiting."

"Where were you?"

"I had gone down to Santa Rosa on an errand, about six-thirty or seven o'clock. I warned Toy to be watchful because she was angry

at me. Down at the ranch came the alarm of fire. I dashed to the threatened forest and in there, on the very edge of the burning timber, I found a horse with a broken leg and Marcia, unconscious as she is now. I brought her here because it was nearer than our ranch house."

"But how on earth did she get there?" the Judge queried.

"Judge, I have no more idea than you have. It may be that she was lost and got into the forest by mistake. I don't know. I only know that I hold myself responsible for it all. I had no right to bring her here against her will. I love her, Judge, and if she dies it will be my fault."

"No, Dennis, it will be mine," the Judge interrupted him. "If anything happens to my little Marcia, it will be a terrible punishment to me."

"You both talk as if she were sure to die," exclaimed Mary Jane. "Marcia is strong—she won't die. I'm glad you love her, Dennis Shawn," she added.

The nurse came to say that they could go in for a few moments, if they liked, but they must not expect her to know them. At sight of the white, vacant face Judge Tracey broke down

and turned away. Mary Jane knelt beside the bed, her hand on the girl's hand.

"Marcia, dear—it's Mary Jane. Look at me. Don't you know me?"

There was no change of expression. Her eyes were on her friend, but they telegraphed no impression to the brain. Dennis fought for composure. He was very tired and he had hoped much from the coming of these, her oldest friends. The nurse motioned them to go, and they left the room.

"It is very terrible," sobbed Judge Tracey.

"We'll pull her out of this—don't despair, either of you. Dennis Shawn, you give us the responsibility here now, and you devote yourself to the fire," said Mary Jane. "I shall unpack and get settled down and arrange with the nurse for part time with Marcia. I think I may be able to help her come back."

"God bless you," said Dennis warmly. "Judge, I've got to go back now. Do you want to come or shall I send for you later?"

"I'll go with you. I won't be gone very long, Mary Jane," he added.

She saw them off in Dennis's motor, then she set her belongings in order and had a long talk with the nurse. The Los Angeles doctor was

expected later in the day, the nurse reported, and she could talk to him about the case. In the meantime, she advised her not to stay in the patient's room, because people made her restless.

So Mary Jane went out to wander about and await the doctor. Off to the west the smoke smudged the skies and the smell and taste of it were in the air. But to the east lay the most beautiful country she had ever seen. She was glad of the fate that had transferred Marcia into the midst of such peace and beauty. Even if her brief stay seemed to have been full of dissatisfaction, even if it had come to the present crisis of danger, still Mary Jane believed that with Dennis Shawn to love her, with such a world to live in, the future still held happiness for her friend.

The doctor came, made his examination, and told Mary Jane his diagnosis and his plan of treatment. He agreed to a brief, tentative effort on her part to catch and hold Marcia's attention by talking of something entirely remote from her present. She must use her intelligence as to how far to go—the patient must not be irritated or excited. He would see her again in a couple of days and decide as to whether it was a wise move.

Dennis, meantime, had handed Judge Tracey over to Williams, while he, himself, pushed ahead to the front line of fighters. As he came to them, one of the men hurried to him.

"Mr. Shawn, we found a body and a horse," he said.

"Any identification? Was he burned beyond recognition?"

"It was a woman, sir."

"A woman!" exclaimed Dennis.

"Yes, sir. We think it was Mexican Kate. We found this, and I think she wore it," he answered, displaying a bracelet. Dennis recognized it at once—it was a trinket he had bought for her in the village.

"Let me see what you found," he said.

The men led him to where the charred thing lay. The conviction leapt into his mind that Kate had been Marcia's companion on the fatal ride. She was helping her to get away. They had planned it that afternoon when Kate came to the cabin. It might have been Marcia lying at his feet so disfigured and hideous! He shuddered at the thought.

"Let me take your shovel," Dennis said. "I'd like to give the poor thing decent burial."

Together they dug a grave and laid the body

in it. Dennis's thoughts were busy considering the fate which had so entangled these three lives.

The fire was almost under control now. Acres of charred ashes lay where the great forests had stood. A day shift and a night shift of men still worked widening the stretch of felled trees—deepening the ditches that were dug to stop the creeping monster. The first time that Dennis felt the danger was over he went to the Padrasso Ranch and sought out Mary Jane.

"Come for a walk, will you? I want to tell you something."

"Can't it wait? Have a bath and go to bed, Dennis."

"Later. The fire's in hand now. I'll have a chance to sleep. But I must tell you something, Mary Jane," he said earnestly, omitting her more formal title as simply as if it had never existed.

"All right. Let me get a sweater," she agreed.

He led her off across country, scarcely looking where they went.

"It's about Marcia," he began. "I know who helped her and how she ran away."

"Yes?"

"There was a woman down at the quarters

near Santa Rosa named Kate. She was a Mexican half-breed I think. I lived with her for a while before Marcia came."

She made no comment, and after a second he went on.

"She disappeared while I was in New York. Nobody knew where she went. I thought she was gone for good."

"Did you love this woman, Dennis Shawn?"

"No. She seemed to—to care for me. I went to her once when I thought Marcia's marriage to Jessup would drive me away from Santa Rosa. I suppose you wouldn't believe how I felt about leaving here?"

"I think I can understand what it would mean to you"—simply.

"I needed a woman—and Kate was there. I don't make any excuses for myself—there are none. I just tell you facts. The day the fire broke out, Kate turned up at the cabin and saw Marcia. She told her of our relations. She may have threatened her. Evidently Marcia induced her to help her get away."

"You knew she was there?"

"Yes. Toy told me—Marcia admitted it. She was very angry with me. There were times those last few days, Mary Jane, when I

thought she did not hate me quite so much—when I had a little hope—— He broke off and did not finish it.

"You think they went off together that very night?"

"Yes."

"But where was Kate taking her?"

"That I do not know. When Marcia would not listen to me—when she shut herself up in her room—I started off to find Kate. I was half crazy with rage. I went to her cabin, but she was not there."

"But how did you learn all this, Dennis?"

"We found Kate's body and her horse, charred almost beyond recognition, in the burned forest."

"Poor soul!"

He turned his face away from her. "It might have been Marcia," he groaned.

She laid her arm across his shoulders, and walked on beside him in silence.

"I suppose Kate thought that with Marcia out of the way, you would come back to her," Mary Jane suggested. "It was like Marcia to find that out, and make use of it."

Dennis had himself in hand now.

"I wanted you to know the truth, because you are her friend. When she comes to herself,

maybe you might soften her anger when she remembers——"

"I'll try, Dennis, because I am fond of you both. Marcia is proud—I've no doubt she felt outraged by Kate's revelation."

"I know. I'm not blaming her—I only blame myself."

"I understand and I'll do my best, if I get the chance—but I think you owe Marcia just what you've told me, Dennis."

"She wouldn't listen."

"Suppose I make it my business to try and get her to listen?"

"I can never thank you, Mary Jane," he said hoarsely.

"You go to bed now, Dennis, and stay there for forty-eight hours. I'll call you if there is any change in Marcia."

"Thanks. I will. I'm all in."

He went to his room and Mary Jane tiptoed in to where Marcia lay. The nurse whispered to her and went out. Mary Jane sat down beside the bed.

"No, Clarke, I can't marry you. I don't love you," the toneless voice vent on. "Where are we going, Kate? I hate you, Dennis."

"Let's go to the Opera, Marcia," said Mary

Jane decisively. "They say the Opera is one of the sights in Paris. To-morrow we start on that motor trip, so this is our last chance."

Marcia muttered a word or so—but the flood of talk was stilled. Mary Jane monologued on about the motor trip. She recalled incidents —she named people they had met, she laughed over some jokes they had had between them. The wavering glance came to rest on her face and Marcia was quiet. She seemed to listen passively.

Finally she fell asleep, and Mary Jane was satisfied.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT WAS two weeks later when one day Marcia opened her eyes on Mary Jane, who sat beside her, and said in a normal voice:

"Mary Jane, where are we?"

"Marcia, you know me?" exclaimed her friend.

"Of course I know you. Am I sick?" she added.

"You've been terribly ill for a long time."

"But are we in Europe?"

"No. We're at the Padrasso place on Santa Rosa Ranch."

Memory came back in flood tide now.

"Dennis is——"

"He is here. Judge Tracey and I came as soon as he wired us of your accident."

"Accident?"

"You were thrown from your horse in the forest, where the fire began."

Marcia tried to sit up.

"Where is Kate?" she demanded.

"Poor soul—she lost her life."

"She did? Who found us?"

"Dennis Shawn. He carried you here. He has been nearly distracted with anxiety over you. He has had to fight the fire and all—but you've had talk enough for this morning, dear. Be quiet now and later the Judge will come in for a little visit."

Marcia fixed big eyes on Mary Jane's face.

"Did you know that the Judge helped Dennis Shawn carry me off?"

"Yes." She smiled tenderly.

Marcia turned away her face and Mary Jane went out to send the nurse and tell the others the good news.

Later, when Judge Tracey came to her bedside, she had no smile for him. He bent over and kissed her, and there were tears in his eyes when he sat beside her, her hand in his.

"I'm too weak to tell you what I think of you now," she said.

"Marcia, dear, you can't say anything that I haven't said to myself. This is the only time in my life that I ever deliberately tried to arrange other people's affairs for them, and the punishment I have suffered since your accident ought to satisfy even you," said the old man humbly.

"There's a good deal to explain, Judge, but I suppose I can't afford to lose you after all these years."

"Marcia, you're the dearest thing in my life, so you must believe that anything I have done, however misguided, was intended for your happiness and good."

"Just now I'm glad of your love—but when I'm well I expect to be very abusive to you for your part in all this."

Mary Jane came in.

"Time's up. Not too much excitement the first day. Have you forgiven him?" she added, smiling.

"No. Just saved up the moment of reckoning," Marcia answered.

Her two friends went away, arm in arm, and the nurse ordered sleep. She asked the nurse if Mr. Shawn was staying in the house and she said he was; that he often sat hours by her bedside. She offered to call him, but Marcia protested, and turned her face to the wall, as if to sleep.

The day passed into evening. The nurse went off for something. Marcia looked up, thinking she stood over her, but it was into Dennis Shawn's eyes she looked.

"Marcia!" he said. "Marcia!" The word was so full of tenderness and appeal that she looked away. She heard him draw a chair close to the bed. When he spoke his voice was near her ear.

"You need not answer me, or look at me, dear. I only ask you to listen," he said. "I've gone through hell since the night I found you in the woods—a hell of regret. We found poor Kate's body—I know that you started off with her because you could no longer endure me. I don't blame you. I only want you to know that I had not seen her after I came back from the East. I thought she had gone for good."

She made no gesture to indicate that she listened—her face was turned away from him. He told her the story of Kate, just as he had told it to Mary Jane.

"There it is—ugly and sordid. I hate it—just as I hate every other mean thing I ever did in my life—because of you. I ought to have known that some day you would come and I would love you as I do—that I would want all my life to have been fit and decent just for your sake. Oh, Marcia!" he broke off. He bent and put his cheek against her hand, but

she drew it away. The look on Dennis's face at that gesture of repulsion would have moved her had she seen it.

The Judge came in.

"Ah, Dennis—I'm looking for you. Marcia, I've good news for you. I have a wire from our attorney that the case is called for three weeks from to-day. We must get you well by that time, and then you and Dennis can wind up your affairs and you can go back to Clarke and the Toy Theatre and the things you like——"

She made no answer.

"I thought you would receive my news with joy, you two," complained the wicked old man, going out of the room again.

"I suppose he's right. You'll go back and forget. And I'll go somewhere, as far from Santa Rosa as I can travel, and try to do the same. Oh, didn't those days in the cabin mean anything to you?"

"Go away!" she said to him irritably, at the end of her endurance.

He went, and only when he reached the door did she turn her eyes toward him.

The next day, after a restless night, Marcia was allowed paper and a pencil because she

insisted upon it so strongly and promised to go to sleep if they let her have it.

She wrote painfully, just a line or two.

DEAR CLARKE:

A great many things have happened to me. I find I cannot marry you, after all. I think you'll understand.

Your friend,

MARCIA.

She addressed it and gave it to Mary Jane to mail. Nothing was said about its contents, but Mary Jane looked mightily pleased as she carried it off.

They forced Marcia to endure a quiet day with no callers. The Judge appeared at her bedside early the next day to say that he and Dennis were going to Los Angeles. He offered to bring her anything the town contained that she wanted. There was no sign of Dennis Shawn to say good-bye.

Her strength came back quickly now, and the doctor permitted her to be up a while each day. When she grew tired of the gloomy old house Mary Jane packed her up and transferred her, belongings and all, to Santa Rosa where they were rapturously received by Chuck, if not by Williams. The boy amused Marcia

and helped greatly in her convalescence. At the end of a week the Judge came back, leaving Dennis in Los Angeles. He was delighted at the improvement of their patient. He told Mary Jane that they could soon carry her back to New York with them.

Marcia said nothing, but Mary Jane sighed.

"I don't see how I can ever stand New York again after Santa Rosa," she said.

"Tut-tut—what about the great work of the school?" he teased her.

"Yes—I suppose my duty calls," she smiled.

It was high noon—hot in the sun. Marcia was tucked up in a big chair in the patio. The white kitten which Toy had brought to her played with a rose on the warm stone flags. Chuck came in from his morning rounds.

"Hello, everybody," he called. "Some day! How's the Princess?"

"Better, thanks."

"Any news from Dennis, Judge? When is the old scout coming back?" asked Chuck.

"He doesn't say."

"We need him all the time. You couldn't run this place without him! Why doesn't he come home and attend to his job!" complained the boy.

"Dennis isn't himself. He's far from well,"

said the Judge seriously. "I'm urging him to take a long sea voyage——"

"Look here, Miss Livingston, you're Dennis Shawn's employer—you order him back from Los Angeles. We need him right here."

The Judge and Mary Jane smiled and tried to pass it off. Marcia never mentioned Dennis's name, never spoke to either of them about him or her plans and intentions. They were utterly at sea as to the relations of these two people so dear to them both.

"Here comes old Williams," remarked Chuck. "Never used to be so prompt to lunch before Miss Paul came."

At this both Marcia and the Judge looked at Mary Jane, who blushed furiously,

"You ridiculous boy!" she said to Chuck, but the germ of a thought was planted in Marcia's mind.

The days passed. Marcia went for a walk, then for a ride with Chuck, but still no sign of Dennis.

"I don't get Dennis," Chuck said on their excursion. "You can't keep him in Los Angeles over night usually—he's always so keen to get back here. He loves this place as if it were his mother."

Marcia was gazing off over the hills, and he went on:

"There never was anybody like Dennis, Miss Livingston. I don't know how girls feel about men, but I tell you men know what Dennis is. Why, the way he worked—the way he handled the men up at that fire was simply great. We couldn't get him to eat or sleep or do anything but go to see you—he seemed to feel that every tree that went was a member of his family."

"Did he find Kate?"

"No—some of the men—but he identified the body and he buried it." Chuck answered. "Gee! The night I came on him in the woods with you in his arms, and the fire behind him! I'll never forget how he looked—as if he'd killed you. He's never seemed the same old Dennis since then. He's kind of old and solemn——"

"Did he ever tell you how I happened to be in the woods?"

"Not he. He's a terrible clam. He never said anything to me about you, except that day he told us you were at the cabin. I said he was a lucky old Irishman and he looked at me, kind of queer, and said 'She's got no use for me, Chuck. She can't bear the sight of me'—

and I knew by the way he said it, Miss Livingston, that you were the whole thing to Dennis Shawn."

She was silent, and Chuck was abashed.

"Look here—you aren't cross with me for telling you this?"

She smiled at him.

"No, Chuck, I'm not cross."

"I don't want to butt in on your affairs, but it must mean something to a woman to know that a man like Dennis Shawn loves her," he said earnestly.

That night the Judge had a consultation with Williams about some matters touching the burned acres. They decided to call Dennis and urge him to come out for a day. The Judge talked to him on the telephone.

"He didn't want to come—said we could settle it—he was busy up there," he reported.

"Of all the nerve! Did you give him the devil?" exclaimed Chuck.

"He said for you to meet him at the 4:10 train to-morrow," the Judge answered.

"It will be good to see him!" said Mary Jane.

Marcia said nothing, but the following afternoon she gave Chuck a note to deliver. She

herself disappeared after lunch. She got on a horse, took the white kitten on her saddle horn and went off in the direction farthest removed from the one by which Dennis Shawn would arrive at Santa Rosa.

CHAPTER XXIV

DENNIS had gone down into the valley of defeat in Los Angeles. Marcia's irritated "Go away" the night when he told her of his love had settled in his mind forever any hope of happiness with her. He had welcomed the necessity of going away with Judge Tracey, and so long as his old friend was with him, and they were busy, he kept Marcia out of his mind The two men never spoke of the thing that was uppermost in their thoughts until the day the Judge was going back to the ranch.

"Judge, I think I ought to tell you that I can't stay on at Santa Rosa," Dennis began.

"That is the worst news I could hear, Dennis."

"I'm sorry. You are the best friend I have in the world, Judge, but I've made a mess of things, and Santa Rosa would be a haunted place for me now."

"You mean that you love Marcia?"

"Yes—and that she hates me."

"Are you sure, Dennis?"—anxiously.

"Perfectly. I told her I loved her, that first day she was conscious, and all she said was 'go away!'"

"She was a sick girl then, Dennis."

"Not too sick to know her mind. No, Judge, she hates me——"

"Dennis, I've made a mess of things, too," exclaimed the Judge with feeling.

"Did you want her to care for me, Judge?" Dennis asked in surprise.

"I wanted it so much that I risked your friendship and hers, my own peace of mind——" He stopped, covering his face with his hands.

"Judge, what do you mean?" asked Dennis gently.

The older man rose and laid his hands on Dennis's shoulders.

"I wanted you two to marry so much that I manipulated this mad experiment."

He explained from beginning to end, and Dennis listened in astonishment.

"Dennis, if you tell me that I have interfered with your life in the most damnably unwarranted way, you will be right!" he concluded.

Dennis paced up and down, frowning.

"Judge," he said finally, "you took a big chance on this thing, and it's turned out pretty bad for me, but I can see how you were tempted

to do it, and I know how much you love that girl—and me, too, sir. I wish for your sake it had had a happy ending."

"You wouldn't come down with me, Dennis, and try once more, now that she's well?"

"It's no use, Judge. I have some pride, you know."

The Judge's arguments and entreaties failed to move Dennis, and in the end, he left him in Los Angeles. Dennis was to decide about his future and write the Judge his decision. He would make no move until after the case was tried and the marriage annulled.

"If we needed your advice very much, at Santa Rosa, would you come down for a day?" was the Judge's parting question.

Dennis nodded as the train pulled out.

It was to make good this promise that he reluctantly stepped on to the 4:10 to Santa Rosa on an afternoon two weeks later. All the way he steeled himself to meet Marcia. At the station Chuck's greeting brought a lump to his throat. They started off on the well-known road and Dennis eyes were wet with the thought of leaving this country he loved.

Suddenly Chuck took something from his pocket and thrust it at him.

"By the way—she told me to give you this."

Dennis opened it—the first line he had ever had from Marcia.

Will you come up to the cabin?

MARCIA.

"Is she—is she well?" he asked Chuck.

"Perfectly. Lovelier than ever, too."

"Let me off at the stables, Chuck. Tell the Judge I had something to attend to—I'll be at the ranch a little later."

"Very good, sir," said Chuck, smiling.

Meantime Marcia had climbed the trail to the cabin. The door was open and Toy was sweeping vigorously. He stopped at sight of her, made his low bow, and went on with his work. The fire was laid, the room in order. The kitchen department was spotless, the supplies just as she had ordered them.

She went out to the woods beyond and carried back great branches of green to make the living room festive. Toy finished his cleaning and disappeared into the shack at the back. Marcia sat down with the kitten in her lap to wait and think. She sent her thoughts back over every step of her association with Dennis Shawn from that first day, which seemed so remote now, when he strode into her drawing room and de-

manded audience with her. She remembered how he seemed to fill the room with his presence, how he dwarfed Clarke Jessup—how he had swept Mary Jane and Clarke out of the room and taken possession of her attention. He had never lost it since. He had dominated her as no other human being had ever done, he had made her work with her hands, he had forced her to consider the rights of another person. She looked back at her days in New York, those restless, seeking days. How empty they had been beside these days in the cabin filled with simple duties and with—— But here stopped. The fear that teased her was that she might grow tired of life out here—that she might disappoint Dennis, and turn out to be a "doll with sawdust insides" as he had once said so bitterly.

"Present," she said, addressing the cat, "we can take only one step at a time, and just now I know that if I had to leave Santa Rosa and—and all, I should die!"

She heard something that made her spring up, colour flooding her cheeks, heart pounding. She tucked the kitten under her chin and went to stand in the door. It was so that Dennis saw her as his horse climbed the trail.

"Dennis," she said faintly, as he dismounted beside her, "Dennis!"

"Marcia?" he said, questioning.

He dropped the bridle over his pony's head, and he wandered away seeking green grass.

Dennis took two steps to Marcia's side and looked into her eyes. She looked back at him and smiled.

"Dennis—welcome home!" she said softly.

He swept her into his arms with such passion that the white kitten was brushed aside and ran for its life.

"Marcia—my love!" breathed Dennis.

He kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair, saying her name over and over, like a prayer. She clung to him, and tasted happiness that was almost pain.

"Marcia," he said at last, "is it a miracle? Am I dreaming this?"

"No, dearest, it's true—it's the truest thing that has ever come to either of us. Oh, Dennis, Dennis, how near we came to missing this."

"Don't!" he shuddered. "Say you love me, Marcia?"

"Dennis, I love you with all my heart, my lover."

After a while they went into the cabin and

he knelt to light the fire. She blew him a kiss and started for the kitchen.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"To cook the supper, my liege lord."

"Oh, no—let Toy do it. Don't go away!"

"My dear," she quoted solemnly, "come out of the sham world in which you have been living! In this real world one must work to eat——"

But the rest of it was quite lost, because her face was buried in the front of his coat, and she felt his laughter beneath her cheek.

"O, little spalpeen!" he said to her. "And are ye glad, darlin', that I brought ye out of your sham world into the real one?"

"Glad? Oh, Dennis!"

She drew his head down to her and kissed him long on the mouth. He picked her up in his arms and subsided into a chair before the fire, holding her like a baby.

"But, the supper—dearest——"

"You'll get no supper this night!" he cried, and started for Toy.

"Get supper, Toy," he ordered.

The Chinaman grinned, bowed, disappeared.

"Now," said Marcia with a sigh, her head on his breast, "now let's begin at the very beginning and talk it all over up to now."

"Now satisfies me!" Dennis said, his cheek against her hair.

"Did you love me that very first day you spoiled my tea party, Dennis?"

"Shure, darlin'. I loved ye before ye were born!"

"That's when I began to love you!"

He held her away from him and gazed at her with astonishment.

"What's that?" said he.

"I did."

"And all this in-between?"

"I didn't know I was loving you then, but of course I was."

He drew her back close.

"Well, I won't quarrel with that, *now*," he said.

"The Judge and Mary Jane will be so glad," Marcia remarked.

Dennis started.

"The Judge! Great Scott, I told Chuck I'd be along in a little while," he exclaimed.

"Never mind, dear. I left the Judge a note."

"What did ye tell him?"

"I said I had gone away with my husband and we would not be back to-night."

"Oh, Marcia—my Marcia—Marcia Shawn!" murmured Dennis, with his lips upon hers.

"Dennis," she whispered, "it sounds like a song."

"It is a song, beloved, a man's song to his woman, a song of life——"

"A woman's song to her man—a song of love!" she added.

So life began for these two upon their hilltop of joy!

THE END